

IN·THE·CITY
OF·UNDER

EVELYNE·RYND





IN THE CITY OF UNDER.

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BY

EVELYNE RYND,

AUTHOR OF "MRS. GREEN," "OTHERLAND," ETC.

"Possunt quia posse videntur."

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THIS STORY BELONGS
TO
MY SECOND NEPHEW,
GEOFFREY CECIL CONGREVE;
WHO
HAS THE CHARM.

TO GEOFFREY—GROWING UP.

Chartley Castle, 1914.

I

The ways of old, the ways of youth,
Oh, those we'll tread no more,
For those led by the hills of youth
Upon an island shore,
Long ago and far away—
Though no one marked the hour and day
That shut a closing door.

II

The ways of men, the ways of life,
Oh, each one finds his own ;
For these lead up the steeps of life,
By these, at last, alone,
A child must climb from reach and sight—
How far from mine the road to-night
That you have gone !

III

But, for those old ways' sake, this book
Is yours ; and on the new
The winds and dreams and tides of life,
Converging, move with you,
Carry you onward day by day ;
So grown-up and far away !
Out of an old Aunt's view.

IV

Courage, and climb !—yet know, beloved,
However fast you move
Up the long road to victory
That runs, alone, above,
Far out of knowledge, sight and speech—
You'll never climb beyond the reach
Of my heart's love.

INTRODUCTION

WHETHER this is a fairy-tale or not it would be difficult to say. It might be, of course, and then again it might not. When one comes to think of it, everything that happened might have happened to have happened as it did. The Hawker may have been no more than a queer kind-hearted observant fellow, living in the heart of the affairs of Under and turning them lightly to serve a friend's end; the age-old legends of the days of the gods and the foreigners of Under may have had nothing to do with the story of John Hazard and the Charm. But there it is. We may all think what we please. Only one thing is certain—move out on your road, and before you have gone half a mile, you will find the whole world thronging along it with you—the world of the long-ago past, and the world of the changing future—faces unknown to you, forces unguessed by you, chances undreamed of

—moving and meeting and passing beside you and carrying you on every step of your road. But leave things be in this black world and sit on the doorsteps of Down Street with old Mother Letitlie all your days—and there, without a dream or a friend, you will end them.

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IN THE CITY OF UNDER

CHAPTER I

THE HAWKER COMES TO UNDER

THERE was once upon a time a boy called John Hazard, who lived with his family in the City of Under and the Street called Down. They lived at Number 179, because it was the only house left of all the houses that had once belonged to the Hazard family, the roof of which they still could call their own. The little slate roof of Number 179, which was so steep and ill-built that slates fell off it into the street whenever a stout man walked by, was not the kind of roof that anyone would have wished to call his own unless he had to, but the Hazards paid no rent for it, and, as they had nothing to pay rent with, that settled the matter.

So when they were left without a father, and very poor, James came to Down Street from Wellington College, and Amoris Ellen came

from her Parisian convent, and John and his mother came from India ; and the Hazards' windows were the only windows in Down Street that ever had clean curtains in them, and almost the only windows that had curtains at all.

John had lived in India all his life, and so had his mother. She had never been in England in the winter, and never seen the City of Under, and of such a street as Down Street she had never so much as dreamed. When first she saw it, she wept with surprise and dismay, but even before she left off weeping she found herself obliged to begin working, for the little house was not fit to be lived in till it had been worked in for many a day. She had no one but John to help her. James and Amoris Ellen did not know how to help anybody, and the girl who had been hired to help hardly helped at all. She had been brought up in a Charity School, and taught not to let her right hand know what her left was doing, which was perhaps the reason why she dropped nearly everything she picked up and often broke it.

From cleaning, John's mother had to go on to unpacking and arranging, and from unpacking and arranging to contriving and planning, till

she had no time left for crying, and John had no time to look beyond the doorstep of his new home and see what it was like there. But when everything had been unpacked and planned, and they had all fairly begun their unaccustomed lives in the little house, there was not much more that John could do, and there was so much that his mother had to do that she had less and less time to do anything for John. When one has three children to cook and scheme and clean and save and sew for, one cannot spend many hours being a companion to one of them, and as for John's brother and sister, they were too old and too clever to be greatly interested in John.

So he began to look round him for some life of his own to take up, and went out into Under to find it. In Down Street he found the Down Street street-boys, numbers of them. They fought with shrieks all the week, and on Sundays they processed about in a tidy and dignified manner, in bow-ties. They had stared at John ever since his arrival, and had shouted remarks at him, such as "Ello, Inja, 'ow's the blacks," or, "Fetch 'is mother to take 'im 'ome," which John, believing to be wit, had smiled mildly upon as he went back or forth upon his mother's

errands. But when he came out among them and introduced himself to them politely, they treated him with unveiled contempt, and hit him because he wore clean collars on a week-day, and gave himself airs. John, surprised and anxious, had to fight them singly and in crowds, and being very short for his years and entirely unversed in the art of warfare, he invariably got the worst of it. After a short period of anxiety and storm, he gave up the endeavour to establish himself and retired from the life of Down Street, and the street-boys, having exhausted him as a subject of interest and expressed their embittered view of anything so different to themselves, troubled about him no more. Sometimes, if they happened to see him anywhere, they expressed their opinion again in yells, but otherwise they rushed on their tempestuous and distracted existence along the pavements of Down Street, and forgot him.

But it was the first time in John's life that he had been repulsed and scorned, and the shock was both astonishing and depressing.

For a time he walked about Down Street alone and looked at the street-boys from afar, but after a while, driven to fresh efforts by the

loneliness and idleness and dulness of his life, he took courage and tried again. This time he went further afield. He left Down Street and went out into the city—into the cold and dirt-grimed streets, dark with winter, sheathed in stone. He might as well have stayed at home. One after another, they were full of vacant-faced, weary, busy people who took no notice of each other or of him; and the further he walked among them the more evident it only became that they were all leading, and he with them, a life in which there was nothing he could do, and nothing he wanted to do, and nothing he had ever done before.

Then John gave it up. Weeks passed and years passed and nothing happened, and there was still no one to make friends with or go about with and nothing to do. He went on living in the dark cold city of Under without heart or interest; and cared no longer.

At twelve years of age he was much the same as he had been at eight. Four winters in Under had not changed what India had begun. He was still very short for his years, and still very silent; and he went now to Mr. Whillipson's Day Academy for Young Gentlemen, where

the schoolboys laughed at him as the street boys had, because he was so little and so polite. It was the best school his mother could afford, and James went to it too, and he and John were the only gentlemen there. But James, who had now reached sixteen, was not exactly in the school. The very highest standard of a day-school in Under was too low for James. He worked independently with Mr. Whillipson, and often he worked independently of Mr. Whillipson; and Mr. Whillipson said James was a genius, and by hook or by crook, for he was bitterly poor himself, he bought for James the advanced books James could not afford to buy for himself, and every now and again rushed passionately in to visit James' mother, and to implore her to be rich enough to allow James to go on with his mathematics and win an astronomical scholarship, instead of going into an Insurance Office to earn a pound a week. James took no more notice of Mr. Whillipson than he ever took of anybody. He went on walking up and down the dining-room carpet working out abstruse problems by himself, as he had always done.

As for Amoris Ellen, she was now fifteen and

she had not altered much either. When she had finished her other work, and sometimes when she had not, she sat and sang in the parlour at the piano her mother had bought for her out of the old bottles and skins money for seven-and-six-pence at a rummage sale. A good many of its notes made no noise at all, and others made noises that you could not call notes, but nothing deterred Amoris Ellen from continuing to sing to it. She sang all her worries to it, such as having to wash up after breakfast, or not having a soul to speak to. The more Amoris Ellen felt things, and there were a good many she felt a great deal, the more she sang to the old piano. Down Street never seemed to be much surprised at the music which had thus suddenly burst forth in its midst. It was not the kind of street to be much surprised at anything. But it never left off listening to it. When the summer evenings returned in the round of the year, people used to sit on the edges of the pavements near No. 179 in stolid meditation while Amoris Ellen sang upstairs behind the open windows like a nightingale imprisoned in a city parlour. But she always knew when there were listeners outside, and for that she sang the louder.

So James had his sums and his dreams, and Amoris Ellen had her songs and *her* dreams, and their mother had no dreams, but she had John and her duty. As for John Hazard, he had nothing. When he was not helping his mother or doing his school-work, he walked about Down Street with his hands in his pockets or sat on old Mother Letitlie's doorstep.

Old Mother Letitlie reposed in an armchair in her doorway all day long with her hands folded. She was very, very old. She could remember times that nobody else in Under had ever heard of. Under was built below a range of hills, and a river flowed through it, and in front of it the flat plains spread to the distant sea, and behind it stood a great cliff, which threw a black shadow over the city streets early every afternoon. It was evening in Under sooner than in any other place in the world, because of the cliff that rose so high into the west behind it. Once the city had been nothing but a little grey-roofed village, with no factories and no railways and only one road to join it with the world; and old Mother Letitlie could tell queer tales of the things that had happened in it then. In those days, she said, nobody would walk

alone under the cliff after dusk had fallen, for fear of the strange feet that might be coming down it from the hills on the top, though there was no way either up or down that anybody knew of except through the gap, ten miles from the city, where there was a break in the cliff through which the river, and the road, and now the railway, wound down from the high country to the plain of Under.

“But *they* needed no road made for 'em,” said old Mother Letitlie; “They made their own way up and down.”

“Did anybody ever look for it?” John Hazard would ask. “Who'd be such a fool as to look for a real way up such a cliff as that?” old Mother Letitlie would reply; “The way they came up and down was a way it would have been little use looking for. There were some that vanished by it, but none of 'em ever came back to tell the road they took. It was a road they couldn't have travelled by if they'd been alone—that much was certain. Those that called up the cliff always got their answer all right.” The exact words of the Call old Mother Letitlie could not remember, but the beginning still ran in her head:

“ In, on, under thee
If aught hear, if aught see,
If aught moves, answer me.”

“ And they all disappeared in the end and never came back,” said old Mother Letitlie.

“ Where did they go to ? ” said John.

“ Up into the hills first, and after that who knows where ? ” said old Mother Letitlie.

“ And who was it answered them ? ” said John.

“ It was the Foreigners answered them,” said Mother Letitlie. “ Those that came down from the hills above Under didn’t belong to this part of the world. Hundreds of years ago they came across the sea, and the Foreigners they were, and the Foreigners folk called ’em.”

“ Did *you* ever call upon them, Mother Letitlie ? ” answered John.

“ Why would *I* be calling upon them ? ” said old Mother Letitlie. “ It’s a black world, and it’s got to be borne with, and the only thing to do is to sit still in it and leave things be.”

But John Hazard would murmur as he sat far below in the little street in the heart of the city and gazed up at the cliff, “ I wonder where the Foreigners went to when they went away

from Under"; and old Mother Letitlie would reply, "It's a waste of time wondering what can't ever be found out. Nobody knows where they went, but go they did when the railway came to Under and folk began to build. It don't matter where they went, nor where they are now. It's much best to leave things be, as I do myself, though there are always fools that won't," said old Mother Letitlie, folding her hands in her lap, and gazing out at Down Street.

Except for old Mother Letitlie, nobody in Down Street ever talked to John. The Ironmonger's Son had once been wont to do so, it is true. Being of an inquisitive disposition, he had at one time consorted with John, that he might discover by judicious questioning interesting details of the poverty of the Hazard family. But even he had said recently, in a lofty manner, that he was afraid he could hardly go on knowing John much longer, for the Ironmonger had taken out a patent for a new way of cleaning fenders, and there was thus every hope that he and his family would soon all be gentlemen. Not poor gentlemen, of course, for whom contempt is the natural portion, but rich gentlemen—a very different kind.

So it happened that on the hot summer Saturday afternoon upon which this story begins, John Hazard had nobody to talk to. Old Mother Letitlie was leaving things be too thoroughly to exclude even John from their number, and she had replied to three polite questions with but one grunt. The Ironmonger's Son had passed by with his nose in the air, for he was walking with the new minister's son, and felt himself unable to recognise anyone of lesser degree. John went down Down Street after his usual fashion, alone, with his hands behind him, and walked on into the city. He walked a long way, through one busy street after another, till he came to a long and narrow little road in which there was nobody but himself. It lay between a wide belt of local railway lines and the backs of high warehouses. Long stretches of it were empty, for the traffic from the little stations on the lines passed straight across it into the city, and up or down it few people ever came.

This was the edge of the city. Beyond the railways lay a long stretch of waste lands, and beyond the waste lands rose the cliff. It ran like a great wall, right and left, for miles and

miles ; and the cloud of smoke that always roofed the city hung against it half-way up, and hid the top. John stood balancing himself on the edge of the pavement in the little street. He often came here on his wanderings, to look up at the cliff for a moment or two before he went on his way again, walking anywhere and nowhere till it was time to go home and help his mother get the tea.

At his back were the crowds of Under, thrusting about in their shut-up streets. The roar of their traffic and activity went up behind him like a cloud. He must presently turn back into it, into the swirl and push and heat, where there was no room and no silence and no company, where every one was doing so much that there was nothing one could do, where, when one was short, one walked for ever down among the other people's legs. Before him stood the wall that guarded the invisible hills. Up in those hills there must be room for anybody. There might be company up there too—strange company, perhaps, according to old Mother Letitlie. John felt that he would not mind much if there were. Nobody believed in stories like old Mother Letitlie's nowadays, of course, but he could

have found it in his heart to wish that he had lived in the days when they *were* believed in. The people of those days were luckier than the people of these. In those days you could at least hope that there might be a chance of getting out of a place where you were bored and lonely. Nowadays, you knew there was no chance at all. Where one was, there one had to stay ; and it was no good minding. In a black world it was best to leave things be and care for nothing, as old Mother Letitlie said. The memory of the words in which the fools who wouldn't leave things be had called up the cliff long ago, came back to John's mind. "And they all disappeared in the end and never came back," said old Mother Letitlie. How had they done it, John wondered. By what way up and out had they vanished out of Under ? Had anybody ever, years and years ago, stood just where John stood then, and wanting to get out so badly that he could no longer care how he did it, looked up at the cliff of Under and said the Call ? John said it to himself aloud—to hear how it sounded :

“ In, on, under thee
If aught hear, if aught see,
If aught moves, answer me.”

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A voice suddenly rose in the street near by. "Staves to sell, staves to sell," it cried ; and, turning round, John saw a Hawker. He had a large bundle of roughly-carved staves on his back, and he was tall and lean and very ragged.

" Were you calling ? " said the Hawker.

" Oh, no, thanks, I was only saying something to myself," said John, politely.

" Do you want a staff ? " said the Hawker.

" No, thanks," said John.

" Staves to sell, staves to sell," cried the Hawker ; and he went on down the street.

CHAPTER II

THE HAWKER COMES TO DOWN STREET

THAT night John dreamed a dream. He dreamt that he heard a voice calling him outside the window. It called so insistently and clearly that it woke him, and he sat up in bed, startled and listening. But the instant he was awake he heard it no more. He looked round bewildered. In the dim light from the street lamp outside he saw the long form of James lying placidly asleep upon a couch strewn with the books and note-books he had been studying till their mother came up to put out the gas. The door was shut; the curtains hung motionless at the window. There was no sound either outside or in. It had been nothing but a dream, and John lay down again and went to sleep and dreamt no more.

On Monday, when he came home from school, his mother met him on the doorstep with the little blue milk-jug, and said, "The heat has

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turned the milk sour, and there's none for tea. Will you go to the dairy across the market-place, John darling, and get some more."

The market-place was even noisier than usual, for every one in it appeared to be cross as well as busy, through feeling so hot. John threaded his way carefully between the booths on his return, trying to guard the little jug, but the crowd was so great that more than once an irritated push or thrust sent the milk flying over on to the ground. At this rate the jug would be as empty when he reached home as it had been when he set out. He took shelter in a corner between two booths and stood considering. The evening was near at hand, and the shadow of the cliff was beginning to advance slowly over the market-place. A cry rose suddenly above the turmoil, "Staves to sell, staves to sell"; and down between the booths came a Hawker, carrying a bundle of staves on his back.

"Why are you standing there?" said he to John.

"Because I can't make my way through the crowd without spilling the milk," said John.

"But it's growing so late," said the Hawker.

"I know it is," said John. "I can't help

that. I'm afraid I shall have to stand here till the people are gone; and there's no way out of it."

"But there's a way out of everything," said the Hawker, and he went on down the passage between the market-stalls, crying, "Staves to sell, staves to sell." And the people made way for his tall figure and his load, and John followed close behind with the little blue jug, and reached the edge of the market-place without spilling a drop.

"Thank you!" said he.

"Do you want a staff?" said the Hawker.

"No, thank you," said John.

"Staves to sell, staves to sell," cried the Hawker, and he turned back into the market-place and disappeared.

All that month the weather grew warmer and warmer. People said that such a summer had never been known in Under before, and a good many of them added that they would rather it had never been known at all. But old Mother Letitlie, on the other hand, said that plenty of such summers had been known in Under when she was a girl. It was just the kind of summer that used to come year after year, cloudless and brilliant, when Under was still a little village and the Foreigners were still in the hills. But

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there had been no black roof of smoke then, added Mother Letitlie, to veil the sunshine and shut out the sky.

John walked more and more slowly home from school every day, and often sat down to rest by the way, with his satchel hung on any area railing that came handy; and one afternoon, while he was thus seated in a quiet street enjoying the first coolness of the cliff-shadow, he heard again the cry that was beginning to grow familiar to him: "Staves to sell, staves to sell," and down the street came the Hawker.

"Why are you sitting on the pavement?" said he to John.

"Well, because there's nowhere else to sit," said John.

"But it's so hot," said the Hawker.

"It's hot everywhere, Hawker," said John.

"There's no way out of *that*."

"But there's a way out of everything," said the Hawker; and just at that moment a Butcher carrying a tray came hurrying round the corner of another street and ran into him. The corner of the tray on the Butcher's head caught a corner of the Hawker's load, and one staff slipped from the cord that bound it. The next instant all

the others came after it, slithering down in a torrent off the Hawker's shoulders into the dust.

"Why can't you look where you're a-goin' to?" cried the Butcher angrily. "A-takin' the middle of the street as if the 'ole place belonged to you. There's others about on business beside yourself, my good fellow," and he hurried on.

The Hawker stood in the midst of his strewn belongings and gazed after the Butcher, and John felt sorry for him. So he arose from the pavement and went to help him pick up his staves. But before he could reach the spot the Butcher had paused, hesitated, turned round, and hurried back also.

"'Ere's a queer thing," he said when he arrived. "I seem to 'ave lorst meself. I could a sworn a minit ago that I was in Boore Street."

"So you are," said John, surprised.

"I *am*, am I?" said the Butcher, equally surprised. "Well, it's a part of Boore Street I never see before, that's all *I* know. 'Ow do I get into Bettering Square?"

"The way you were going," said John, "and the first turn to the right."

"Oh, so I do," said the Butcher, and he hastened straight on.

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"No, the way you *were* going," said John.
"That's exactly the opposite way."

"Oh, so it is," said the Butcher, and he turned abruptly to the left and began to climb the area railings of the nearest house.

John contemplated him in great astonishment.

"I thought you wanted to go to Bettering Square," he said.

"Oh, so I do," said the Butcher, and he climbed down the area railings and hurried straight across the road, dashing his tray with such force into a lamp-post on the opposite pavement that he flew backwards with the shock. He gave it up, turned to John and the Hawker, and looked from one to the other with a pale face.

"What's 'appened to me, I arsk you?" he said, trembling.

"You're on the wrong road, you see," said the Hawker.

"I know I am," said the Butcher faintly, gazing at the Hawker.

"You'd better try and get on the right one, I think," said the Hawker.

"I know I'd better," said the Butcher; and he began to pick up staves so fast that he could hardly hold them as he picked them. John and the

Hawker helped him, and when all the staves were gathered up and tied together, the Butcher in trembling haste bound them to the Hawker's shoulders.

"The first turn to the right," said the Hawker, "will lead you into Bettering Square."

"I know it will," said the Butcher, and he fled down the street without another word and flashed round the corner into Bettering Square as fast as his twinkling legs would carry him.

John gazed after him in amazement. "He must have been ill," he said; for no other explanation occurred to him.

"Well, it doesn't follow," said the Hawker. "He was certainly lost, but then there are heaps of people lost, and more that haven't so much as started. Do you want a staff?"

"No, thanks," said John.

"But I have all sorts of staves," said the Hawker. "Staves for slack feet and heavy hills; staves for the road's beginning, and staves for its far-off end. How will you climb the cliff if you won't take a staff of me?"

"Climb the cliff!" repeated John, astonished. "Do you mean the cliff of Under, Hawker? It would take a pretty strong staff to help me climb that."

"No stronger than many I have, though I mayn't carry them under my arm," said the Hawker.

"Well, but I'm afraid I haven't any money to buy any sort of staff with, thank you," said John, "so there's no way out of *that*; and if I had, there's no way up the cliff of Under, so there's no way out of that either."

"But there's a way out of everything," said the Hawker; and he went away down the street crying, "Staves to sell, staves to sell."

Three nights later John dreamt again, and again he dreamed the same dream. Again the calling voice awoke him, but when he sat up to listen he could hear nothing. The night was so hot, however, that this time he did not go to sleep again. He lay gazing at the light on the wall from the street lamp outside. There was no sound outside or in. James lay deep in his usual absorbed slumber, and the last inhabitant of Down Street had reluctantly decided that unless he went to his bed it would be time to get out of it before he got in. The only thing moving in Down Street was the faint, cool wind that came down from the hills into Under when the cliff-shadow began to move over the city,

and blew seawards through the streets all night. John saw the curtains moving softly out from the window, and, getting out of bed, went to seek air.

All the windows opposite were dark, and the street was empty. A low sky hung over the city, and along the pavements the gas lamps burnt without a flicker. Suddenly the sound of a footstep arose in the silence. John heard it drawing nearer and nearer through the night. Some one was coming to Down Street—a policeman, or some workman who had been working overtime at his factory.

Refreshed by the breeze, John was just about to turn from the window and go back to bed, when he caught sight of a figure coming up the middle of the street between the gas lamps. He paused in surprise. It was the figure of a man with a load on his back. The Hawker had come to Down Street.

He came along till he was under the gas lamp, and there he stopped and looked up at John.

“Do you want a staff?” said he.

“Well, I never heard of a Hawker before who tried to sell his wares to a person in a night-shirt at a window in the middle of the night!” said John, leaning out of the little top window.

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"I must offer you my wares where I find you," said the Hawker. "How long is it going to be before you understand? Don't you hear the breeze blowing and the trees rustling far up in the hills over Under? Will you stay down here in the City of Under for ever?"

"How can I help staying down here?" said John, astonished. "How could I possibly get up to the hills over Under?"

"Climb there," said the Hawker.

"*Climb!*" repeated John, gazing down at the Hawker in still greater surprise. "What *are* you talking about, Hawker? How could I climb the cliff of Under? There's no way to climb by."

"Have you looked for a way?" said the Hawker.

"There's no way to look for," said John.

"But there are ways out of everything everywhere," said the Hawker; and he pulled his load higher on to his shoulders and went away down the middle of the street.

They had spoken in low voices. There was no sound in Down Street, and James still slumbered undisturbed. John went back to bed, and lay there, looking at the light on the wall, and thinking.

CHAPTER III

THE FORESTS ON THE HILLS

THE next morning, on his way to school, John paused at old Mother Letitlie's doorstep.

"I rather think of going to see if I can find a way up the cliff of Under," said he.

"Gracious save and bless us, what nonsense is this!" said old Mother Letitlie irritably. "There isn't a way to find except a way you couldn't go by alone if you did find it. So you may as well leave *that* be, my lad."

"Well, you can't be sure there isn't another sort of way till you've looked for it, you see," said John, "and nobody ever has."

"What's it to you whether there's a way or not," said old Mother Letitlie.

"I think I would rather like to get up to the hills and the woods," said John, considering.

"You might get up to a good deal worse than the hills and the woods," said Mother Letitlie. "You leave things be, my lad, or you'll be sorry."

However, you won't get up to anything, so there's no need for talking, and so long as you don't come stroodling in and out disturbing me about it, *I* don't care where you try and get," said old Mother Letitlie, folding her hands in her lap and gazing out at Down Street.

When he came out of school that afternoon, John walked to the little street by the local railways, and looked across the waste lands at the cliff. Silent and mighty, it rose into the still afternoon air. "It's much best to leave things be," said old Mother Letitlie's voice in his mind, and that was certainly true enough. "But there's a way out of everything," said the voice of the Hawker, and that might be true too; and if there was really a way out of Under up the cliff to the hills and the woods, it was the first thing worth attention that John had met with since he came to Under. Should it turn out to be a way that required a very great effort, one could always return to one's conviction that it was much best to leave things be, and go home again to Under.

So John crossed the railways by the wooden bridge at the nearest station, and descending into the station approach on the further side,

saw, in the left-hand corner of the high hoardings that surrounded it, an old broken gate swinging on a rusty hinge. He went through it, and found himself on an unused grass-grown cart-track that ran between the fenced railings and the waste lands, and stretched far into the distance.

Straight down the cart-track John went for about half a mile. Nobody had paid any heed to him. The people of Under seldom paid heed to anybody unless they had to. They were too busy getting themselves paid things—salaries, or wages, or profits, as the case might be—and no one had troubled so much as to glance at John as he crossed the bridge and went through the old gate. The waste lands here belonged to the railway company, and they used them as one uses a cupboard under the stairs. They stowed away upon them all the things they would never want again, but could not bring themselves to throw away in case they ever did. There were towering bramble-grown hillocks of old iron and broken engines and worn-out carriages and rotten sleepers and scrapped machinery; and little grass-grown paths wound in and out between them and led to the cliff; and when John turned off the cart-track on to the

waste lands, the hillocks hid him completely from view.

If the cliff looked high from the city, it looked infinitely higher when one stood at its foot. It stretched up above one, tier upon tier, dark and sheer and tremendous.

"I don't see how it's possible that there can be a way up this," said John, standing like a speck in the grass far below. He turned southwards and walked along doubtfully. The station dropped further and further behind him. The sound of the city and the railways came faintly across the open spaces. Every step took him deeper into the loneliness and quiet of the waste lands and their shadow; and the hot wind came sighing over the grass to meet him. He walked for about a mile. Not a line, not a seam, broke the smoothness of the great shoulders of rock that rose beside him. It was as old Mother Letitlie said, and as the people of Under had for so many centuries believed. There was no way up the cliff except for feet that needed no way made for them; and the Hawker's bold words had been the ignorant words of a fool.

So John turned to go home; and as he turned the wind rose with a stronger sigh, and brought

with it the sound of running water. John paused. It was hot, and he had walked far. From the further side of a piece of rock that jutted out from the foot of the cliff in a peculiar manner some little way ahead, the wind brought again the faint and musical tinkle. He made for it, and walking round the jutting rock, came to a dead stop, for there before him was a way up the cliff.

It was easy to see how it had been made. For hundreds of years a little stream, flowing from some spring far away up in the woods, had come dropping from point to point down the face of the cliff. Every year it had worn its channel a little deeper and made its borders a little greener and carried down more of the soft shale and earth, and left the edges of bed-rock, that could neither be worn nor carried away, standing out more sharply from its sides. Now its path rose deeply through the cliff, like a steep and irregular stairway.

John Hazard stood staring at it. He had forgotten that he was tired and thirsty. "It's this way or none," said he; and he laid his satchel on the grass, and all alone, with the distant roar of the city behind him, he started to climb the cliff of Under.

Over and over again did he nearly come to the conclusion that nothing in the world could be worth such a struggle as this was proving to be, and that it would be much better to climb straight down again without waiting to fall down, and spend the rest of his days in Under leaving things be. Sometimes the projecting rocks were so far apart that when he stood on one he could only just reach the next with his fingertips ; and sometimes he could not reach it at all and had to pull himself cautiously up by tufts and bushes that threatened every second to give way and send him flying. The hot weather had reduced the little stream to a trickle, but even so it was impossible to climb in it without soaking one's knees and sleeves and feet, and most of the footholds were slippery with wet moss. John scratched and bruised himself, and tore his clothes, and ached with the violence of his efforts ; and before he had climbed very far he could not look down because it made him giddy to see how far he had to fall if he fell, and he could not look up because it made him giddy to see how far he had to climb if he did not fall. But every time, after sitting breathless and irresolute on rocky pinnacles making up his mind

that he would climb no further, he did climb further. It began to dawn on him as he went higher and higher that, however difficult it might be, he was certainly finding a way where way there was supposed to be none ; and every time he paused to see how far he had come, it seemed a pity not to see if he could not get a little further yet. So he went on. Lower and lower beneath him fell the streets and squares of Under, till the town looked like a little play-city set in the green plain. Its distant roar died to a murmur ; and soon he was so high that the only sound in the silence was the rattle of small stones he himself set falling. It seemed to him now that he must be very near the top. He took a firm hold of the rocks, and leant back to look up. He nearly climbed down on the spot, so huge were the stretches of cliff-side that still hung unbroken over his head. He forced himself up for another long reach ; and again, when he leaned out from the cliff to look up, he saw the green channel rising and rising into space above him.

“ I can’t go on at this much longer,” he said to himself as he sat tired and panting on a boulder.

The sun touched the hills at that moment ;

and far below the cliff-shadow began to move forward over the plain, and the first cool night-wind came blowing from the invisible woods. It blew down the channel upon John, and with it, twisting and fluttering, fell a fresh green leaf.

“The tree that that came from can’t be very far away,” thought John to himself, and he set his face to the cliff and started once more. He climbed a long way before, too breathless to go another yard without rest, he allowed himself to pause, and again gaze up.

This time, high above him, so high still that he could only just catch a glimpse of it by straining far backwards, there hung a line of green—a distant edge—the edge of the forests upon the hills. As far as the cliff of Under was concerned, at any rate, the Hawker had been right. There was a way out of the city, and John had found it.

Late that night, just as his mother, feeling a little anxious about him, was hastening downstairs to get his supper ready after hastening upstairs to turn down the beds, the front door suddenly opened and John himself appeared. He was wet and dirty from head to foot in front and behind; his collar hung down his back,

one bootlace trailed far behind him, his cap was stuffed into a torn pocket, and his arms were full of the boughs of forest trees. "John *darling!*" ejaculated his mother; and she was so much surprised at his unwonted aspect, and at the burden he carried, that she sat down on the stairs.

The next morning John left for school rather earlier than usual, and stopped at Mother Letitlie's doorstep on his road.

"I've found a way up the cliff of Under," said he.

"There isn't a way to find," said old Mother Letitlie.

"But I have found one," said John.

"You couldn't have," said old Mother Letitlie.

"But I *truly* have found one," said John.

"Then don't come stroodling in and out disturbing me about it," said old Mother Letitlie irritably, "for it's the same to *me* what you've found. If you like to go climbing where nobody's ever been before except fools that couldn't leave things be and those that had better never have been anywhere, it's your own affair. *I* don't care if you want to go rushing up precipices when you'd much better set where you are and

leave things be in a black world," said old Mother Letitlie, folding her hands and gazing out at Down Street. She was the only person, beside his mother, to whom John spoke of his discovery, and his mother was so busy inside her house that she had hardly any attention to spare for anything that was not inside it with her. All she said was, "Be careful coming down, John darling, for it does look horribly high, and when next you go up hadn't you better put on your oldest suit?" John had for a moment thought of telling the Ironmonger's Son also, but after a brief consideration he dismissed the idea. A secret is a thing you only share with a friend, and he did not wish to share his secret with somebody who was not in the least his friend, however often he might be obliged to be glad of his company. Besides, a secret told to the Ironmonger's Son very soon left off being a secret, for he was the sort of little boy who instantly told everything to everybody.

So when John walked out of Down Street again on his way to the cliff of Under, he walked alone.

It took so long to climb up that it was little use going except on Saturdays. On week days he did not get out of school till five; and if he

went after five it was almost time to come down by the time he was up. But on Saturdays school was over at one o'clock, and every Saturday by half-past one John was on his way up the cliff to the woods. There he would wander till the night fell, all alone among the bracken and the glades, paddling and fishing in the streams, watching the woodland creatures, climbing the great trees, finding new haunts every week, and new flowers to take down to his mother in Down Street. There was room and company and silence and song and shade and sunlight and endless things to do and see and hear up in the forests; and the dirt and crowds and loneliness of the City of Under mattered to John no more.

One afternoon he climbed an old stone pine that stood alone on a knoll high above the other trees. Sitting in its topmost branches, he could look across the green sea of the forests in all directions, and he saw for the first time the abrupt spurs of the long line of treeless uplands that edged the forests in the west. If you went straight up through the trees from the cliff you came to these uplands in no very great space of time; but right or left, parallel with the cliff, you might walk mile after mile and still be in the

forests. Behind the uplands ran the railway and the highway, making for the break in the hills ten miles further along ; and the merchants of Under journeyed up and down from Under by them, travelling along behind the hills with their heads full of figures and their eyes fixed on whatever happened to be opposite them, which was generally an advertisement of a new way not to be seasick or have corns. Some of the spurs of the uplands ran out into the forests, and stood up above the trees, high and shining, golden with gorse. John descended from the old stone pine, and set out for them.

He walked a long way, going up through the trees in as straight a line as he could guess at, and presently the slopes began to rise more sharply and the light of open spaces gleamed beyond the tree-trunks ; and a moment later he came out on the edge of a long narrow glade that ran down into the forest from the foot of a high bare spur. At the further end the spur lifted itself abruptly into the sunshine ; at the lower end, deep and dark among the bracken between the closing trees, near a curious long turf-covered mound that rose amid the fern, there stood a little house.

CHAPTER IV

THE IRONMONGER'S SON

JOHN stopped in surprise. It was the first sign he had come across that there might be somebody beside himself up in the forests. The little house was built of turf sods and roofed with dry bracken; and its windows were shuttered with wooden shutters and its door was closed and chained.

John walked round it, wondering, but on no side of it was there anything to be seen or discovered. It stood without a sign of life, silent and shut. He went on his way towards the further end of the glade, but every now and again he turned round and walked backwards for a few steps that he might look at the little house again and consider it; and it was while he was doing this that a hand came suddenly down on his shoulder and a voice said :

“ Is that door chained ? ”

John, greatly startled, twisted himself round.

He found himself in the grasp of a big burly man with black hair, who stood holding him and gazing over his head at the little house.

"Yes," said John.

"And the shutters up?" said the man anxiously.

"Yes," said John.

"Then 'e's not there," said the man. He let his hand fall. "Well, I shan't try again," he said. "It's never no good tryin' nothink. I shall just go 'ome again an' let things be, an' I wish I'd *always* let things be, a-comin' all this way up from Under to find 'im gone. I *thought* the place looked empty—an' me with business I can't speak to 'im about in the markets 'owever orften I might find 'im there. Well, I shall let things be now anyway, upstairs lodger or no upstairs lodger, and if Willium wants to run 'is 'ead into a noose, Willium *must* do. I come all this way to try an' get something as would stop Willium runnin' 'is 'ead into a noose, an' now the 'Awker aint 'ere to give it me. Not as I believe I should 'ave got anythink as would 'ave done any good. Nothink's ever any good. It's a fool's notion, any'ow. Oo'd believe in such rubbidge? An' yet there's no denyin'

they've worked for some—yes, there's no denyin' they've worked for some. But I shan't try again. I shall leave things be."

He turned about and plunged into the forest, and John heard his heavy steps crashing further and further away, apparently in the direction of the uplands. He was still standing staring in bewilderment at the place where the man had disappeared, when he heard another step behind him, and turned round in fresh surprise. Another man—a man with a load on his back—was just coming through the trees at the lower end of the glade.

He emerged from the trees, crossed to the little house, let first his load and then himself down on to the grass beside it, and stretched his arms with a sigh of relief.

"Ugh, the city of Under!" he said, "I'm glad to be out of it."

"Do you live up here?" said John in astonishment.

"Sometimes," said the Hawker.

"But how do you get up?" said John.

"Do you climb up by the waterfall?"

"Never," said the Hawker. "There's more than one road to most places, you know. There's

the way that that man came by who was here just now, for instance—the same way by which he is hurrying miserably home again at this moment because he didn't instantly succeed in finding the person he wanted and the thing he sought."

"And how did *he* get up?" said John.

"By the goods train which starts from the City of Under at four in the morning," said the Hawker. "Behind the uplands there, there's a little platform at which the old goods engines stop after their long climb up the valley ten miles away and their long run along the tableland behind the uplands. There they halt for water and repairs, and there, if the guard of the goods train has been given money down in Under, he will let a passenger alight."

"Do you give him money to let you alight?" said John.

"No," said the Hawker. "I once gave him something else. But it's more sending on than alighting that he lets me do. Well, when the passenger has alighted, he crosses the tableland, and climbs up and down among the uplands till he reaches the edge of the forest, and finds his way here after long searching. And he goes back by the same way. It takes the best part

of a day and two nights, and it costs the best part of five shillings, but it's a good enough way for those who only come up from Under to go back there again. Ugh, the people of Under!" said the Hawker, lying back among the bracken and gazing up at the sky with a sigh.

"Well, I thought there was only me up in the forests," said John with a sigh.

"There *is* only you and me," said the Hawker. "That's not so very many, you know. There's plenty of room. The people of Under never come further than the edge of the forest, and they only come that far for what they can get. What do *they* care about forests? They prefer the City of Under. Who in the city of Under ever gives a thought to the hills and the woods on the top of the cliff? They are much too busy putting things in carts to rush somewhere and take them out again, or buying things without any money and selling them when they aren't there to sell. But you, you were different. So here you are. Though you took a long time getting here, didn't you? And now," said the Hawker, turning on his side and lying with his head on his arm looking at John, "where next?"

"Where next?" repeated John, puzzled.

"Yes," said the Hawker. "There are more staves where the first one came from, you know, and that one didn't come from my shoulders. What after this?"

"I don't understand *quite* all you say, Hawker," said John politely, after a moment's thought, "but if you mean where am I going to after this, it's getting rather late and I'm going home to Under."

"That's not much of a place to be going home to," said the Hawker, turning on his back again and gazing up at the sky.

"No, it isn't," assented John with a sigh. "But it can't be helped. I wish I needn't. I wish I could stay up here for ever and ever, and never see Down Street again. But when people are poor they've got to live where they must, of course, and not where they want to, and there's no way out of it."

The Hawker turned his head and looked at John again. After a moment's silence, he rose. "There's a way out of everything," he said. He went to the little house, and let down the chain of the door. "Good-night," he said, and disappeared inside.

When John passed through Down Street that night Mother Letitlie's door was empty. The night was so hot that it had proved too warm even for old Mother Letitlie to let it be, and she had gone in a state of irritation to bed. But he met the Ironmonger's Son. The Ironmonger's Son, accompanied by several of his friends, was strolling loftily in the light of his father's shop, which was open late because it was Saturday night.

"Hullo," said John politely, as he passed by, but the Ironmonger's Son was weeding his acquaintance with a view to the future and he walked on still more loftily. "Yah, gentleman," said he with contempt. "Yah, gentleman," said all the little boys who were assiduously walking with the Ironmonger's Son in the hope of not being weeded. John, wearing his patched knickerbockers and carrying his little bundle of leaves and flowers for his mother, passed thoughtfully upon his road.

By half-past eight, he and his mother were washing up the supper things in the basement kitchen of No. 179. The girl who came to "help" and never helped at all, had left off trying to on account of the toothache, and had

gone home. Amoris Ellen was singing in the parlour on the first floor; James was plunged in study in the dining-room on the ground floor. John and his mother were alone together except for the supper things; and though these took up a good deal of attention, it was possible to attend to other things at the same time. John related the events of the day to his mother while they scraped and washed and dried cups and saucers and plates together; and his mother said "gracious, John darling," as was her wont, whenever the course of his narrative appeared to demand it. But when he came to the incident of the Ironmonger's Son, she paused with a plate in one hand and a dish-cloth in the other, and said:

"Who is the Ironmonger's Son, John darling?"

John explained.

"That stout child in second-hand Etons from the saucepan shop at the corner?" said his mother.

"Yes," said John, mentally endeavouring to reconcile this description with the beautiful picture presented to an admiring and envious Down Street by the Ironmonger's Son in his best suit on a Sunday.

"My dear John!" said his mother. "Do you know children of that kind?"

"Well, I don't actually *know* them," said John "because they won't know me. That's more it."

"They won't know you," ejaculated his mother.

"No," said John.

He was surprised to see that for some reason or other his mother appeared to take this much to heart. She looked at John a moment; then she left off washing up, and, sitting down on a chair with a plate in one hand and a dishcloth in the other, she looked at the floor as though she were looking at something she could see through no more than she could the floor. John, regarding her anxiously, was dismayed to see two tears roll slowly down her face.

"What did I say?" he said with horror.

"You didn't say anything," said his mother, rousing herself with a sigh.

"I must have," said John, "You're crying."

"I'm not, John darling. You didn't," said his mother; and she dried her eyes on the dishcloth. But she still sat on the chair as though for the moment she felt she could not get off it

and go on washing up. "It was only," she said, "I don't know why—but somehow something made me feel for a second as if things were going all wrong in spite of all I do to try and make them go right."

The voice of Amoris Ellen singing higher and higher to the tinkling accompaniment of the old piano came floating faintly down to the kitchen; and in the dining-room directly overhead they heard the regular tread of James, as he walked up and down pondering abstruse problems on the path his nightly studies had worn in the carpet.

"Listen to those children," said John's mother, sighing. "I am sometimes afraid they are both of them geniuses, and how they will take it when they really understand that the things they can do so well are the things they are never going to be able to do, I don't know."

"Aren't they ever going to be able to do the things they can do so well?" said John.

"Never," said his mother. "We are too poor. Mr. Whillipson was here to-day to bring James some old professor's treatise about a solar something or other that James couldn't afford to buy, and he was begging me again to

keep the rest of us on bread and water in order that James may go on with his mathematics for another year and try for an astronomical scholarship. But it would hardly keep even *him*, poor boy, even if he won it, and it would certainly bring the rest of us in nothing for years to come. I have had to count all along on his beginning to earn something for us all when he is seventeen; and he is seventeen next term. And as for your sister—even if she were to win a scholarship at a musical college, as she wants me to try and let her do, she would need good clothes and pocket money, and I can give her neither. She must just go out as a nursery governess some day, and I don't know whether an extraordinary capacity for singing higher and higher is an accomplishment that will make up in a nursery governess for the lack of all other accomplishments. I'm rather afraid it isn't, John darling."

"What is a genius?" said John.

"Nobody quite knows," said his mother. "But they are generally people who are no good to those who love them and a great deal of good to thousands who don't."

John's pity for a genius, already of a considerable depth owing to his contemplation of James

and Amoris Ellen, was greatly increased by this definition. He embraced his mother with silent sympathy.

“And now,” said his mother, “you come and tell me that a dreadful little saucepan-maker’s son doesn’t think you good enough to associate with him! Oh, John darling, it would be so encouraging if even only one of you could begin to make a little money! It would make me feel as if there really were still perhaps the ghost of a chance that there might, some day, be a way for some of us out of Down Street.”

Before he went up to bed that night, John walked out to the doorstep to get a breath of air. Behind him his mother went about the little house, putting the last things to rights in it before she shut it up for the night, and Amoris Ellen still sang softly in the parlour upstairs. John sat on the doorstep alone, tired from his long afternoon in the hills, looking out at Down Street and thinking. He was thinking of all the things his mother had told him that evening. They were things he had always known, when he came to think of it, but then he had never come to think of them so clearly before. He could see little use in coming to think of them now. What

could he do to alter them ? How could a boy of twelve, and small at that, find any way of earning enough money to move a whole family out of Down Street ? There was no use whatever in thinking of it ! Here they were, and here they must all stay, for there was no way——

“Are you asleep ?” said a voice, and John looked up with a start. A little girl with a sorrowful face and a pair of dark eyes stood on the pavement in front of him.

“No,” said John.

“Well, I thought you were,” said the little girl. “I’ve spoken to you twice, and you never answered. We’ve heard that a Hawker who sells carved staves and helps people to escape out of Under, lives down this street. Do you know in which house he lives ?”

“I’m afraid I’ve never heard of any Hawker living in this street,” said John.

“Well, we’ve asked here and we’ve asked there,” said the little girl, with a sigh, “and they say he’s been seen down this way late at night when nobody is about.”

“The only Hawker I know who sells staves lives up in the woods on the top of the cliff,” said John.

"On the top of the cliff!" repeated the little girl in dismay.

"But I believe he sells his wares in the markets," said John.

"Hast thou found him, hast thou found him?" said a woman with a hooked nose, hurrying anxiously up.

"No," said the little girl, "But this little boy says he sells his wares in the markets."

"Why do you want to find him?" said John.

"Because they say he finds a way of escape for all who go to him in trouble," said the woman, "a way out of every difficulty; a way out for all. And we must find him, we must find him, for the little Papa grows so venturesome, and the upstairs lodger has come to the Waysend Inn, and at any moment it may be time to fly."

"Come in, John darling, I must lock the door," said his mother, appearing in the doorway.

"Come away, come away," said the woman, seizing the little girl by the arm.

"Oh, dear me! oh, dear me!" said the little girl, and they were gone.

CHAPTER V

THE ADVENT OF AUGUSTUS

THE next Saturday was Fair Saturday, so John could not climb up the cliff of Under. On Fair Saturday things were cheaper in the markets of Under than on any other day of the year, and John's mother, trying not to believe that they were only cheaper because they were worse, always went marketing on Fair Saturday, and laid in her stores for the year; and John went with her to help carry the parcels. When they had finished marketing, John's mother said with a sigh that she wondered whether you really got things any cheaper on Fair market-day than on any other day, which was what she wondered every year; and they went homewards.

But as John, laden with parcels, was following his mother through the crowd, a cry suddenly rose above the turmoil—"Staves to sell, staves to sell," and John paused.

"Would it matter if I came home a little later?" he said. "There's someone here I want to see first."

"Very well, John darling, only be careful of the parcels," said his mother.

So John turned back alone into the markets, and found the Hawker without difficulty. He was standing in a corner by himself, with his staves arranged in heaps before him. "Good evening," said John, appearing suddenly.

"Good evening," said the Hawker.

"Is it true that you find ways out of things for people, Hawker?" said John,—“ways out of Under, or anything of that sort.”

"I do sometimes," said the Hawker.

"Well, I wish you could find a way for us out of Down Street," said John.

"There's a way out of everything for everybody," said the Hawker.

"You're always saying that, aren't you?" said John politely.

"I say it because it's true," said the Hawker. "Don't you believe it?"

"Well, I don't see how it *can* be always true," said John. "It seems to me that there are hundreds and hundreds of things that there's

no possible way out of. How can there possibly be a way out of being all by yourself, for instance, or twelve, or small, or things like that ? ”

“ Wait here a little, and you shall see a few things that there’s a way out of,” said the Hawker ; and he went on calling his wares to the crowds.

There was an old packing case lying near, belonging to a neighbouring stall. John arranged his parcels on one end of it, and sat down on the other to see what would happen, and presently two stout young people came walking by. The young woman hung on the young man’s arm and laughed archly, but she might as well have hung and laughed on a Corn Exchange for all the good she did. He walked comfortably along, chewing a head of oats that still had the grain in it, and staring stolidly about him, and he let her hang and laugh entirely by herself. Just as they came abreast of the Hawker, she suddenly turned red, snatched her hand out of the young man’s arm, slapped his face soundly and roundly, and disappeared into the crowds.

This happened with such surprising suddenness that the young man sprang high into the air from shock, and on coming to earth again,

and realizing what had occurred, he stood staring at the place where the young woman had disappeared for fully five minutes with his mouth wide open.

“Do you want that stout girl?” said the Hawker. “You will travel no further with such a one as she.” The young man slowly altered the direction of his gaze and stared at the Hawker some moments before he understood. Then he said, “Warnt ’er? Of course I warnt ’er. I’m a-goin’ to marry ’er when I ’ave the time.”

“Great Jove, the people of Under!” said the Hawker, gazing back at him. “Well, it doesn’t look much like marriage for the moment, does it?”

“She’s always rushin’ orf from me like that there,” said the young man gloomily. “I don’ know whaffor. I don’t see other young men’s young wimming a-doin’ of it.”

“You can’t keep what you don’t take,” said the Hawker, “though personally, of course, I should ask nothing better than that she should rush away from me. However, you can have what you want if you like to take it.” He put his hand into his pocket and brought out a

hazel nut. "Crack that," said he, "and put the kernel into her mouth, and kiss her twenty times immediately afterwards without speaking and she will never rush away from you again."

"It don't look like nothing more than a nordinary nut," said the young man slowly.

"It's a Charm," said the Hawker.

"A Charm?" said the young man. "Are you the 'Awker as sells Charms? I've 'eard of you if you are. A Charm's a charm, of course. A Charm's a different matter. I'll try it. What's to pay?"

"Nothing," said the Hawker. "All Charms won't work for every one. Half a sack of oat flour if it does."

"Ow' did you know I was a miller?" said the young man, opening his mouth wide once more, but the Hawker was already crying his wares again, "Staves to sell, staves to sell."

John's eyes were as wide open as the Miller's mouth, but he sat still and waited, and presently a man went past with a sullen face, followed by a mournful-looking, dishevelled woman in a torn and untidy gown and a battered little hat. She went drifting after the man, and as she passed, she saw the Hawker's wares. "Thomas," she

called, "Stop a moment, Thomas. I think I'd like one of those carved staves, Thomas." Thomas did not appear to care what she thought she would like. He walked on with determination, and disappeared into the crowd.

"Is that your man?" said the Hawker.

"He's my husband," said the woman, with a sigh.

"Nobody would have thought so," said the Hawker.

"Well, I remember when first we married——" said the woman, the tears springing to her eyes.

"When first you married," said the Hawker, "I don't suppose you looked as you look now. That sprig of rowans in your bodice is the only attractive thing about you."

"Well, when Thomas took me from my father's farm——" said the woman weeping.

"He must have been often sorry he didn't leave you there," said the Hawker. "You are one of those who, because of looking backward, will never go on. However, you can have what you want if you like to take it." He ran his hand down the edge of his ragged coat, and took out a needle. "Whatever is torn in your house, or on yourself," said he, "mend it with that

needle ; and if there are things past mending, which I should think very likely, throw them away and make new ones with that needle. Then, in spite of your miserable remembering, your man may be glad again that he took you from your father's farm, though it's not a thing I should ever have done myself."

"It looks like nothing more than an ordinary needle," said the woman feebly, drying her eyes.

"It's a Charm," said the Hawker.

"Oh, are you the Hawker who sells Charms ?" said the woman, "I've heard of you. Give it me, Hawker. What is there to pay ?"

"Nothing," said the Hawker, "All Charms won't work for everybody. A comb of moorland honey if it does."

"How did you know I came from the moors ?" said the woman, surprised ; but the Hawker had lifted his head and was looking silently at the cliff. The sun had touched the top of the invisible hills, and far below the cliff shadow had begun to move forward over the city and the market-place.

John slipped off the packing-case. He had heard enough, and his mind was made up. He

stooped to collect his parcels as speedily as he could, but there were a good many of them, and it took him some time, and when he lifted himself the Hawker was gone. John heard his cry going further and further across the market-place, "Staves to sell, staves to sell," but though he hastened after, he could not make sufficiently quick progress through the crowds for there to be any hope of his catching up the Hawker. So he went home.

By two o'clock on the following Saturday afternoon, having already visited the Hawker's corner in the market-place and found it empty, he was on his way to the cliff. By half-past three he was half-way through the forests, making for the Hawker's glade by as straight a line as he could guess at. He came out under the uplands some way to the left of it, and found himself so breathless and tired with the haste he had made that, though visions of a closing door and a departing figure urged him onward, he sat down to rest at the foot of a tree. He had hardly sat a minute before there broke on his ear the sound of a tremendous crashing inside the wood, as if an elephant had gone mad there and was endeavouring to

get out of the forest by the simple process of destroying it, so that there should be no more forest left to be in. John listened in surprise, and after a moment the noise ceased, and a loud voice shouted "Hi." John debated whether he should answer. He had no wish to be delayed on his way by any chance encounter. But the voice roared again, louder and more insistently than before, "Hi! I say, Hi!" and John felt it incumbent upon him to reply since he was plainly the only person who could. "Hi!" he shouted, and the thrashing and crashing instantly recommenced, accompanied by footsteps that were clearly approaching with all possible speed.

"Where are you?" shouted the voice.

"Here," shouted John; and the next instant a large red boy burst out of the edge of the forest, and catching sight of John instantly made for him.

"What are you doing here?" he boomed as he bustled along. "Do you know you're trespassing?"

"No," said John, surprised.

"Well, you are, and so I tell you, or at least you very nearly are," said the large boy. "I'm Augustus Clickson, and when my father retires

from business and leaves Under, which we're going to do next year, I mean to ask him to buy these woods, and build a house in them, so get out."

"If he hasn't bought them yet, I don't see that I'm trespassing yet," said John, considering.

"Well, you very nearly are, so I tell you," said the boy, "and you'd better be jolly careful, anyhow. My father's the Honourable Asaph Clickson."

"You must be very proud of him," said John politely. "My father was rather honourable too, I'm glad to say. He was a V.C. It will be my eldest brother's someday, of course, when he marries and has a son, but at present we can all live up to it."

Augustus Clickson glared at John with the glare of one who is uncertain whether he is being chaffed or not, but presently deciding with some surprise that he was not, he put his hands into his pockets and leapt thoughtfully up and down once or twice upon his rather large feet.

"Well, get out *anyhow*," he remarked, "I'm lost and I want to get out with you. I was coming back from a visit to Wayport and I went

for a little walk while the engine was watering at that platform up there, and I went too far and lost my way and couldn't get back. I've walked and walked for hours and hours, and at last I got down into these beastly woods and I thought I was never going to get out again. Where are we ? ”

“ We're on the edge of the forests above Under,” said John.

“ Didn't know there *were* any forests above Under,” said Augustus Clickson. “ Well, come on back to the platform, or we shall lose the last train down.”

“ I'm afraid I can't come with you to the platform,” said John, politely, “ I've got to go somewhere else.”

“ Where have you got to go to ? ” said Augustus, with instant indignation.

“ I've got to go and see a Hawker,” said John. “ He lives in a glade over there.”

“ A Hawker, what sort of a Hawker. Why does a Hawker live up here ? ” said Augustus, leaping, “ I'll come and see him with you.”

John looked at him in some doubt. “ I shall have to hurry a good deal,” he said, “ it's important, and he vanishes like lightning. The

other day I only missed him in the market by a minute."

"My gracious, come on then," said Augustus; and he bustled off along the edge of the forest. John, surprised but acquiescent, hastened after him, and together they rushed under the trees. They came to the opening of the glade under the uplands, and turned down it, but when they reached the little house at the lower end, one glance was enough to tell John that they had come in vain. The door was closed and chained, and the windows were shuttered.

They walked round it; they called and knocked at the shutters and the door. But there was no answer, and no movement within. "There's nobody here, my good chap," said Augustus. "You'll have to come again."

"It takes so long to climb up that I can only come on half-holidays," said John gloomily.

"Takes so long to climb up where?" said Augustus, surprised.

"Up the cliff of Under," said John.

"Do you mean to say you climb the cliff of Under?" cried Augustus at the top of his voice.

"Yes, I do," said John reflectively. He was a little sorry he had told,

Augustus was too much astounded even to leap. "My gracious!" he ejaculated. "I thought *nobody* could climb the cliff of Under."

"Nobody else does," said John, "there's never anyone in the forest but me and the Hawker—except on the edge of it."

"Well, my gracious!" repeated Augustus. He thrust his hands deep in his pockets and leapt on high. "How does *he* get up here?" he said.

"By the railway, I suppose," said John. "Round by the gap and down across the uplands, as everybody else does."

"Well, my gracious!" said Augustus yet again, "I thought *nobody* could climb the cliff of Under. Who showed you the way up?"

"Nobody," said John. "The Hawker seemed to think there might be a way, but I found it by myself. I don't suppose it's been a way so very long. You can only just do it now. And it takes such an age I can only come on Saturdays."

"It can't take as long as coming round by rail, any way," said Augustus.

"Oh, well, I couldn't do that anyhow," said John. "That takes the whole day. And it costs too much into the bargain."

"*Costs*," said Augustus Clickson. "It only costs half-a-crown third even on to Wayport. What's half-a-crown? Save it if you haven't got it."

"You can't save even a penny unless you first have a penny," said John.

"And haven't you?" said Augustus to this indisputable financial maxim.

"No," said John. "Not to spend on things." He looked to see the expected change on the countenance of Augustus at this revelation of his family's poverty, but there was no such change as John expected. Augustus merely put his hands once more into his pockets, and again leapt thoughtfully.

"My gracious!" he ejaculated, "You *are* poor," which was not a remark that could hurt anybody's feelings.

"Yes, we are," said John, relieved. "I do have a penny a week, but it's owed at the baker's for some time to come. You get so hungry seeing all the other boys eat things. It's because we're so poor——" He paused. One can be truthful about facts even in the face of possible contempt, but there is no obligation to lay oneself open to scorn by admitting one's

fancies. He glanced at Augustus Clickson, but the probable opinion of Augustus on the subject of charms was not to be gathered at a glance.

"It's because we're so poor what?" inquired Augustus, lucidly.

"Nothing much," said John; "I was only going to tell you what I wanted to see the Hawker for."

"Well, what did you?" said Augustus.

"I wanted to see him to buy a Charm from him," said John.

"You wanted to see the Hawker to buy a *what*?" shouted Augustus.

"A Charm," said John.

"What for?" said Augustus, loudly.

"I told you," said John. "Because we are so poor."

"Well, of all the silly rot!" cried Augustus, at the top of his voice. "How's a Charm going to help you?"

"Don't you believe in them?" said John, pensively.

Unexpected though Augustus had been on the question of his family's poverty, it was evident that he was going, on the question of Charms, to be as expected as possible.

“ I should rather think I *didn't* believe in them,” said Augustus. “ Nobody but a lunatic believes in Charms nowadays.”

“ Yes, some people do who aren't,” said John, and he told Augustus what he had seen in the market-place of Under. Moved by the absorbed if contemptuous manner in which Augustus listened, and the thoughtful way in which he every now and again put his hands in his pockets and leapt, John told him still more. He told him of the gloom of his family's future, and of the necessity of some one's trying to earn a little money to encourage his mother to hope that they might some day some of them find a way out of Down Street ; and he pointed out the obvious fact that, if anyone *were* to try, it must be John himself, since he alone of the family had not had the misfortune to be born a genius. But what way there was to find, and how John could ever find it alone, had seemed questions of such insuperable difficulty that John had decided, on hearing of the Hawker's reputation, to ask him for help and counsel, and had therefore sought him in the market and seen him selling Charms.

“ Well, but how's a Charm going to help you,

idiot!" said Augustus, contemptuously. "A Charm's all rot, and so I tell you."

"He sold two while I watched him," said John. "He seemed to feel certain that they would help those people to find their ways out all right."

"He sold two things he *said* were Charms, I daresay," said Augustus. "How do you know they were, my good chap? How do you know that that girl isn't rushing off every minute of the day, and that that woman's husband doesn't walk away from her the instant she calls him?"

John was obliged to admit that he did not know these things.

"Then there you are," said Augustus, "A Charm's all rot and so I tell you."

"Well, I'm not going to bother about it any more anyhow," said John, resignedly. "It's never any good bothering about anything. If there wasn't one thing in the way, there'd be sure to be another. There always is, and I shall just leave things be."

"I don't think you've got any business to, then, with your mother in that state, and all your family geniuses," said Augustus with decision. "You needn't give up like a chicken with the

pip just because you can't get a Charm. Any person with half an eye can see what you ought to do without any rotten old Charm to help them. You ought to be an errand-boy."

"What?" said John, astonished.

"You ought to be an errand-boy," repeated Augustus, "you could start earning money at once if you got a job as an errand-boy. All the richest people were errand-boys once. You ought to try to get a job as an errand-boy, and you needn't try alone, either. I'll help you."

John gazed at him in surprise.

"Yes, I will," said Augustus magnanimously. "I'll help you look for a job. I've got to be at home for ages because there's measles at Cheltenham, and there's nothing whatever to do in a beastly hole like Under. I'll come round with you myself, and help you get a job."

"I *mightn't* get one even then, you know," said John doubtfully. "I'm only twelve and small at that, though thank you very much, of course."

"Of course you'll get one," said Augustus, indignantly. "You'll get one at the very first go off. You'll find it a jolly different business to going about looking for one *alone*, my good

chap, and so I tell you. I don't say I can do it quite for nothing, of course," added Augustus. "We'll strike a bargain. You show me the way up the cliff of Under, and I'll help you get a job. There."

"Will you swear you'll show it to nobody else?" said John.

"I swear," said Augustus Clickson.

"Come on then," said John; and they plunged into the woods.

CHAPTER VI

THE MILLER'S CHARM

JOHN walked down Down Street at a little past five on the following Monday afternoon, and took his seat on Mother Letitlie's doorstep, there to await the arrival of Augustus Clickson. He had decided to tell his mother nothing about his hope of becoming an errand boy. If she knew about it, and he did not succeed, there it would be, nothing but another disappointment for her to bear ; while if she knew nothing about it, things would be no worse for her if he did not become an errand boy than they had been before. Augustus was strong in his view that there could not possibly be any disappointment whatever for her to bear in any event, but John said that it would be better to be safe. So they had arranged to meet elsewhere than at John's home, and Augustus Clickson was to proceed down Down Street looking first for a doorway with an old woman sitting in it, and then for John.

“ Well, I hope you’ve given up climbing where you’ll get no more good than anybody else ever did,” said Mother Letitlie, when John arrived and sat down on her doorstep.

“ No,” said John, “ I haven’t.”

“ Then some day you’ll go up once too often and never come back again,” said old Mother Letitlie, “ I don’t know what’s taken you that you go stroodling in and out like this instead of sitting quiet and leaving things be as you used to do.”

“ Well, I like it better up there than I do down here, you see,” said John.

“ Like it better ? ” said old Mother Letitlie. “ Where’s the use of wanting to like things better ! There’s nothing in this black world worth liking either better or worse. Sit still in it and leave things be—that’s the only thing worth doing. Once you start moving you don’t know what you mayn’t find yourself having to try and do—and who wants to try and do anything.”

Augustus Clickson, who had been meanwhile descending swiftly from Wickle Hill—which was where his parents lived in one of the best suburbs of Under—came rushing along Down Street at that moment, looking to right and left, and seeing John seated on Mother Letitlie’s

doorstep, he came to an abrupt stop, put his hands in his pockets, and leapt thoughtfully on high.

"What's all this?" said Mother Letitlie, emerging from her dark reflections to behold Augustus with strong distaste.

"It's a friend of mine," said John, arising from the doorstep and preparing to depart.

"And where are you off to now with this friend of yours?" said old Mother Letitlie.

"Why don't he come and set quiet on the doorstep if he wants to come at all, which I'd just as soon he didn't if you ask my opinion."

"Well, there's something he and I have got to do," explained John. "We're going to look for work for me—for a job of some sort."

"A job for you!" said old Mother Letitlie. "*You* find a job! *You* won't find a job, and you the shrimp you are."

"Of course you'll find a job, John Hazard," said Augustus Clickson with loud contempt. "What does she know about it? You'll get a job this very evening. Come along and don't stand talking rot."

When they parted a few hours later, Augustus was still full of contemptuous confidence. "Only a fool would expect to find a good situation at the

first go off," he remarked, "and I've said so from the very beginning. I'll come again to-morrow."

So on Tuesday evening Augustus Clickson again rushed down from Wickle Hill, and on Wednesday evening he was once more to be beheld doing the same thing, and on Thursday evening he came yet again. In short, on every evening of the week that followed did Augustus rush from Wickle Hill to Down Street, and the inhabitants of the streets between the two places almost began to set their clocks by him, so punctually did he burst past their windows on his way. When John saw him coming, he now left Mother Letitlie's doorstep and went to meet him, because Mother Letitlie had continued to behold the rushing arrivals of Augustus with distaste. She said that if John wouldn't let things be he must take the consequences, and it was the same to her what anybody did nor didn't do so long as they didn't stroodle in and out disturbing her about it; but Augustus Clickson did stroodle in and out, and let him stroodle somewhere else.

Alas, by the time Friday evening arrived it seemed as if they might just as well neither of them ever had stroodled anywhere, for John and Augustus were no nearer finding work than they

had been on Monday evening, and the indignation of Augustus and the resignation of John had grown with the passing of every day. In every shop in which they had seen a card hanging up with "Boy wanted" upon it—and in a good many shops where there was no card at all—there they had entered and offered John's services. But nobody seemed to want them; and when they found that if they did want them, they could only have them before, between, and after his school hours, except in the holidays, they wanted them still less. The worst of it was that several of them seemed to want the services of Augustus instead, which greatly complicated matters. Augustus was only a year older than John, but he was as much broader as he was taller, and he addressed people in such a loud, confident voice that he impressed every one as being important and desirable, and directly it became clear that it was not he, but the pale, peaked, anxious little John who, generally on one leg, was offering himself for the vacant situation, all was over and they were shown the door.

At last John tried going in alone, while Augustus, his hands in his pockets, leapt abstractedly on the pavement outside. But it made no difference

to the ending of the interviews. All that it did was to make them a good deal shorter ; and Friday evening came and John had found no work.

Now, Augustus Clickson was of an ardent nature. Directly he thought of doing a thing he seldom saw any difficulties in it till he came to them, and after that he seldom saw anything else. He had walked forth with John on Monday with every confidence that by Tuesday or Wednesday at latest, John would be established in a comfortable situation. On Wednesday he already suspected, with indignation, that there might be a few difficulties in the way. On Thursday, as repulse followed repulse, they both tried with so little heart that they might just as well not have tried at all ; while John's resigned manner had become so resigned that, what with his resignation and his nervousness, he almost walked out of the door the instant he had made known his request, without waiting to have it answered.

At last, on Friday evening, when John came walking dejectedly out of a shop for the third time, Augustus Clickson suddenly reached the point at which he saw nothing whatever but the difficulties, and he boomed so loudly in the street that several people glanced at him with interest,

thinking he was ill. But Augustus was not ill ; he was merely angry. He was angry because John had not found a place, and he was still angrier because people had not given him one the instant Augustus desired them to do so. He said at the top of his voice that it was perfectly ridiculous to think that anyone would ever give John a job when he was the size he was through staying so long in India, and would stand on one leg the whole time as if he was a chicken with the pip, and he, Augustus, had said so from the very beginning, and they had much better go home at once, and leave off bothering about the whole thing.

John was perfectly ready to go home at once. As a matter of fact, the second time he had come walking out of a shop he would, had he been alone, have walked straight home then and there. Long before they came to Friday evening, he was only walking in and out of shops because Augustus Clickson led him in and out with such determination that John went with him whether he thought it any good or not, in a silent acquiescence in the sanguine energies of Augustus. He did *not* think it any good. He did not think anything would ever be any good. He had always known it wouldn't be, and it was certainly

much better to leave off bothering about the whole business and go home, and leave things be. So they walked back to Down Street.

Old Mother Letitlie was in bed by the time they reached it, so she did not behold this melancholy confirmation of her prophecy, but the rest of Down Street was still walking about, and it was an unfortunate chance which led the Ironmonger's son to observe John and to miss observing Augustus Clickson when the two went dejectedly past him in the dusk. "Yah, gentleman," said the Ironmonger's son; but it was the last time he did say it. Augustus Clickson was already greatly embittered with fate, and it is a trying matter to be embittered with fate, because fate is not a thing you can hit. He instantaneously fell upon the Ironmonger's son, and the Ironmonger's son, with a howl of astonishment, fell to the earth.

"What-did-I-hear-you-calling-John Hazard?" said Augustus, with a fierce shake of every word.

"You didn't 'ear me calling 'im nothin'," howled the Ironmonger's son. "Lemme go."

"You called him a gentleman, you wretched little street cad," said Augustus Clickson, furiously. "You let me hear you insult John Hazard again. Apologise."

"Of course I apolergise an' me lyin' 'ere the way I am," said the Ironmonger's son weeping. "I don't want to insult no one. I swear I'll never call it 'im again. Lemme go."

This incident somewhat cheered Augustus Clickson, and when they reached No. 179, and he was preparing to part from John, he put his hands in his pockets and leapt abstractedly up and down.

"Let's climb the cliff to-morrow," he said. "It's no good bothering about that other thing and so I tell you."

"It's never any good bothering about anything," said John Hazard.

So the next day he and Augustus departed at half-past one, it being Saturday and a half holiday.

Climbing the cliff of Under was an arduous business for the weighty Augustus Clickson. John was able to advise him how to take the best advantage of whatever hand or footholds the waterfall afforded; but even so, Augustus, clinging to a rock half-way up, began to boom. He said he was going down again at once, and it was ridiculous to try and climb a cliff like that, and he had said so from the very beginning. John remarked doubtfully that climbing down

was not much less difficult than climbing up, a truth of which Augustus had had ample evidence the Saturday before, when his hurried descent of the first part of the waterfall had been much more like falling than climbing. Moved by this memory to further effort, Augustus, still booming, re-commenced to climb, and at last they both scrambled out at the top of the channel.

There lay the earth below them, tiny and dwarfed and far away, with the green plains spreading to the distant sea, and the river winding and curving through them, and underneath the cliff the impenetrable motionless smoke of Under, and away on the horizon the smoke of Wayport, the great fortified naval port which was the next city along the coast. And behind them lay the forest, green and deep; and not till the moon rose over them need John and Augustus go down again to Under. Augustus, much pleased, dusted the knees of his trousers, and said there were few things one could not do if one tried, and he had always said so.

They went straight up through the forests and out on to the uplands. There they spent the afternoon; and they were still a long way from the forest edge when suddenly, in a valley

below them, they saw a man waving his arms. He kept waving and waving, all alone knee-deep among the gorse.

"Is he waving at us?" said Augustus, surprised.

"Perhaps we'd better wave back and see," said John.

So they waved, and the instant and energetic response of the man below left them in no doubt as to whom he was waving. They descended to see what was wanted of them, and were met by a stout young man with a very red face, which he kept wiping with a red handkerchief which appeared to wipe more red on to his face instead of wiping any off.

"I've been walking up and down inside these 'ere 'ills since ten this morning," he said, "and I'm 'arf dead. Whereabouts up 'ere lives the 'Awker as sells staves and Charms?"

"He lives in a glade on the edge of the forest," said John, "But you are still a long way away from it."

"What!" ejaculated the young man. "Good 'eavens, what am I going to do now." He sat heavily down on a rock. "All day long 'ave I been 'unting for 'im up in this 'ere 'owling wildi-ness," he said. "I couldn't find 'im in the

markets, so I 'ad to come up 'ere. I started at four this morning by train from Under, I did, and 'ere I am, and 'aven't got to 'im yet. An' 'ow am I goin' to walk miles to a glade in a forest when I've got to catch the last train as passes that there 'alt platform miles be'ind the 'ills, which I can't do any'ow unless I start this instant. What am I goin' to do now, I ask you?" He scratched his head, and looked at John and Augustus; and John and Augustus looked back at him. John had a feeling that he had seen him somewhere before, but he could not remember where.

"Are you young fellers fellers as a feller could trust?" said the young man, solemnly.

"Well, there's only us to say so, of course," replied John, considering, "but I think we are."

"Of course we are," said Augustus Clickson, indignantly.

"What's your fathers?" said the young man.

"Mine was a soldier," said John.

"I don't see what it's got to do with you," said Augustus, booming. Not that he meant to be impolite, but he was often loud and refusing at the start of a thing, no one quite knew why.

"Well, there ain't no need to take on about

it," said the young man, with reproachful surprise. "Ow'm I to know if I don't ask? It's important, I tell you. The 'Awker as I'm lookin' for ain't the sorter person as any man 'ud wish to cross if 'e could 'elp it, or I shouldn't a-troubled to come all this way to pay 'im. A man as can work a charm as easily as 'e can could lay a spell too if 'e 'ad a mind, lemme tell you, young chap. But I ain't goin' to miss the train 'ome an' 'ave to stay up 'ere in this 'orrible 'owling place all night for anybody. Look 'ere, you find that 'Awker for me, since you know where he lives, an' when you've found 'im, you say to 'im, 'That Charm worked all right, an' the 'alf sack of oat flour is waitin' for you at the 'alt behind the 'ills.' 'E'll understand all right. Now then, what is it you've got to say?"

John repeated the words. He knew now where he had seen the young man. He added, "Then doesn't she run away any more?" and Augustus Clickson suddenly put his hands in his pocket and leapt in the air.

"No, she don't, though I don't know 'ow you know enough to arsk it," said the young man, with satisfaction. "Walks by me as willin' as

you please, she does. An' don't mind waitin' till I've got time to think about it an' nime the day. Now you remember it's important, an' 'ere's an 'apenny for you."

"We don't want the halfpenny, thank you," said John, politely. "We'll do it without."

"So much the better," said the young man, and he re-pocketed the halfpenny and went off into the uplands, and John and Augustus were left looking at each other.

"That was the Miller I saw the Hawker selling the Charm to in the market-place," said John.

"I know it was," said Augustus Clickson. "A Charm's your only chance, and I've thought so from the very beginning. Come on."

They scrambled up ridges and raced down valleys, making across the uplands for the edge of the forest at full speed. As they turned into the glade, they saw a tall figure emerging from the trees at its further end.

"There he is," said John; and Augustus came to a dead stop, and putting his hands in his pockets, leapt abstractedly on high.

CHAPTER VII

THE THREE FIRST TRIALS

THE Hawker slung his staves from his shoulders to the ground.

“Good evening,” said he.

“Good evening,” said John, advancing. “This is Augustus Clickson, Hawker, a friend of mine. We were in the uplands just now, and we met that Miller you sold the Charm to in the market-place.”

“And the Charm’s worked,” said Augustus.

“Yes, the Charm’s worked,” said John. “She doesn’t run away from him any more.”

“Ugh, the fools of Under!” said the Hawker, sitting down on the turf.

“And the half sack of oat flour is waiting for you at the railway platform,” said John.

“Will you sell us a Charm too?” said Augustus suddenly thrusting his hands deep into his pockets and leaping on high.

The Hawker lifted his head and looked at John with his half-smile.

"You have been a long time about it, haven't you?" he said. "Well, go on."

John stood on one leg in a slight embarrassment and looked at the Hawker; and Augustus fixed his eyes on a distant tree-top and coughed.

"We weren't quite sure at first, you see, Hawker," explained John, "but we are now. We would like a Charm very much, to help me get a job."

"Yes, to help him get a job," said Augustus.

"Clickson and I have tried to get one, but we can't," said John.

"No, we certainly can't," said Augustus Clickson.

"I want a job as an errand-boy," said John, "but I'm only twelve you see, and small at that, and nobody will have me."

"Yes, he wants a job as an errand-boy, but nobody will have him," said Augustus Clickson strongly. "Of course an errand-boy's a beastly thing to be, but all rich people were errand-boys once, and *one* of them would be starting to earn something anyway, and they're as poor as church mice, and his brother and sister are

geniuses and can't earn a penny. Unless Hazard encourages his mother to hope that they may some day some of them get out of Down Street there's not a soul to do it."

"So can we have a Charm?" said John.

"If he can't," said Augustus Clickson, "it's no use his hoping to do anything, and so I tell you, and I've said so from the very first. Of course, a Charm's all rot, but if you gave the Miller one that succeeded, I don't see why you shouldn't give John Hazard one too. If you don't, there's not the faintest chance that anyone will ever take him. I went round with him myself to try and make them, but what can you expect with him the skinny size he is through staying so long in India, and so nervous he will stand on one leg."

The Hawker picked up a staff from the pile that lay on the ground beside him, and handed it to John.

"At last," he said.

"Is that a Charm?" said Augustus, surprised. "It looks like nothing more than an ordinary carved stick."

"It's a Charm," said the Hawker.

“Are they all of them Charms?” said Augustus, gazing at the heap.

“Not necessarily,” said the Hawker.

“What do I have to do with it, Hawker?” inquired John. “Do I just walk in and out of shops with it asking for jobs?”

“No,” said the Hawker. “Keep it always in your left hand, and when you try for a situation, stand firmly on both feet, bend your head, and make a line in the air with your right hand—so—straight from your forehead to the ground. The first time you try it, it may perhaps not succeed—nor the second, nor even the third—but——”

“But the fourth time it *will*,” said Augustus Clickson. “My gracious!” and he leapt abstractedly anew. The Hawker looked at him meditatively and said nothing.

“Thank you very much indeed, Hawker,” said John. “What is there to pay?”

“Nothing,” said the Hawker.

John and Augustus looked first at him, and then at each other, in surprise.

“Nothing at *all*?” said John.

“Nothing,” said the Hawker.

“Not even honey or oat-flour or something like that?” said John.

"No," said the Hawker.

"But you let those other people pay you something," said John.

"I know I did," said the Hawker. "They were no travellers, those."

He rose, went to the door of his little house, and unfastened the chain. Augustus fixed his eyes on a distant tree-top, and coughed abstractedly, leaping.

"Are you sure, Hawker?" said John politely.

"Quite," said the Hawker, and he let the door-chain swing with a clank.

John advanced and held out his hand. "Thank you very much indeed then," said he. "Shall we come and tell you when we've succeeded?"

"Do," said the Hawker.

So they shook hands, and John and Augustus went away into the forest, and the Hawker, after looking after them for a minute, pushed his door open and disappeared into his little house.

By the time John and Augustus were down on the waste lands, it was too late to try the Charm. The shadow of the cliff lay darkly over Under, and every one in the city was just

about to sit down to supper. So John and Augustus arranged to meet in Down Street at five o'clock on Monday, and Augustus went bursting up Wickle Hill after his manner, and John returned home.

Old Mother Letitlie was sitting in her doorway as he passed by, and at her feet sat a neighbour's daughter who, by the light of a tallow candle set on the doorstep, read the news to Mother Letitlie for a penny an hour, twice a week, out of a halfpenny evening paper, with a nervousness of spirit that frequently ended in tears and flight. Old Mother Letitlie could not read herself but she took a gloomy pleasure in hearing about the doings of the fools who would not sit on doorsteps in a black world, and let things be; and as there was always some mother in Down Street who insisted on her daughter's earning a penny an hour whether she wished to or not, another daughter always arrived in tears as soon as one daughter had fled for good, and Mother Letitlie always had somebody to read her the news.

"I was looking out for you, John Hazard," said she, nodding and beckoning when she saw John. "You come here a moment." She

prodded the neighbour's daughter with her stick. "Read that bit about the police again," said she. "Go on, go on," and the neighbour's daughter sniffed, and desperately wetted her forefinger as an aid to spelling and self-control; and read in one sentence, headlines and all, with no stops and her own pronunciation, the spirited and humorous effort of the evening halfpenny journalist.

"Puzzled peliss vanished vagrants ha peliss peliss really indeed need we find fault with our good cus—cus—cus of the lor but ha peliss peliss where is the singing girl who was arrested for begging in the street last week and where is the literary tramp who was taken up for being without visible means of sub—sub—sub last Sunday afternoon ha peliss peliss to let them both slip through your fingers in the street and then slip through them again for good and all when you had actually traced them to the Waste Lands is this your care of us blew-coated gardeners of the con—con—con ha peliss peliss."

"And after *that*, John Hazard," said old Mother Letitlie, as the neighbour's daughter paused for breath with a gasp, "I hope you'll let things be, as I've told you times without

number. There's trouble enough in a black world without adding to it by stroodling in and out."

"Why after that?" said John.

"Why after *that*?" echoed old Mother Letitlie. "Do you know where the Waste Lands are, my lad? They're under the cliff, and its not the first time I've heard of vanishings off the Waste Lands under the cliff, nor the first time that you have either. It's my belief that the Foreigners are back again, and at their work in Under. But I don't care what anybody does or doesn't do so long as they don't stroodle in and out disturbing me about it. Go on with your reading, get on with your reading, do I pay you a penny an hour to sit on my doorstep and sniff!" said Old Mother Letitlie, with irritation, and she prodded the neighbour's daughter.

Punctually at half-past five on the following Monday afternoon John and Augustus left Down Street together. During their former efforts, before his rising wrath had swept all before it, Augustus Clickson had always encouraged John heartily when he went into a shop, had waited for him hopefully while he was inside it, and had walked away with him dejectedly when he came out. Now, however,

all was changed. There would be no further need either for encouragement or dejection. They left Down Street full of confidence.

Augustus Clickson had pointed out that since the Charm would not in any event succeed till the fourth trial, it would be both useless and foolish to try and make it do so. Trying, as Augustus Clickson said strongly, was always a bore, especially when you had to try at the same thing more than once. Besides, they had had enough of trying already, and it would be extra stupid to waste time endeavouring to do a thing you knew perfectly well beforehand you couldn't. The point was to get the first three times over as quietly and easily as possible, without bothering to try at all, and then to concentrate all their efforts on the fourth trial.

So they went out in the city again, and the first shop they came to with a card in the window they entered. It was a tailor's shop and Augustus said approvingly that it would do very well indeed for the first time because it was such a beastly little place. So John went in. The shop was small and dark and so was the tailor. He was at work in a wheeled chair at a low table which was fastened to it, and by his side

was another table strewn with papers. John took the Charm in his left hand, and with his right he touched his forehead and made a sweep through the air to the ground. "Do you want an errand boy, please?" he said.

"Well, they taught you manners, wherever it is you come from," said the little tailor approvingly, pausing in his stitching. "Oh manners, manners, what potry there is in manners!"

John looked at him a little uncertainly. He was wondering how far one ought to go in asking for something one did not want and knew one could not have.

"Then do you want an errand boy?" he said.

"Well, I suppose I might do, if 'e was the right sort of boy," said the little tailor. "But I should feel the wrong sort of boy very quickly, very quickly indeed, I should. It would be a dreadful thing to a person of my sensitive feelings if the wrong sort of boy went walking round about me. Oh, what potry there is in everything, even in the choosing of a boy. And any boy I 'ave 'as to be an extra trustable sort of boy, you see, because I'm a life-cripple."

"A what?" said John, taken aback.

“A life-cripple,” said the little tailor
“Twenty years I’ve been in this chair and I never get out of it except to be lifted into my bed and when I get out of it for the last time it’ll be to be lifted into my coffin, and that may be any time now, for I shan’t be much longer in Under. Oh, it isn’t so dreadful. You needn’t look so took aback. There’s few things a man can’t find ’is way out of by a back street if ’e can’t walk out of ’em by the front door, and I’m as often out of this chair as in it, though I mayn’t get out of it on my feet. Take potry now. There’s a spear for a man. As large a spear as you could wish. Ah, what potry does for a man. There may be a few things as I don’t seem able to ’ave through sitting all my life in this chair, sech as a wife and that—but I get it all in potry. All, I do. And it ain’t no trouble to me. I throws it orf as I goes along. Look at this now.” He drew a sheet from the table at his side. “‘Lovely wooman, lovely wooman,’” read the little tailor in a tremendous voice, “an’ there’s ’eaps more as good as that. Writ that orf in a minute yesterday between a coat and a waiscoat, I did. But about me wanting a boy——”

At that moment a sound was heard like the squeal of a pencil on a slate, and the face of Augustus Clickson, surprised and anxious, appeared at the window, white with compression against the window pane, while his flattened nose squealed on the glass and his eyes rolled round the shop.

“Good evening and thank you very much,” said John earnestly ; and he hastened from the shop, leaving the little tailor much surprised at so abrupt a termination to what he had thought was merely the beginning of a long and interesting conversation. On John’s appearance outside, Augustus rebuked him for wasting so much time. “He was a life-cripple—an awfully brave little man,” said John. “He gets out of being a life-cripple by writing poetry.”

“I don’t care how he gets out of anything,” said Augustus sternly. “He couldn’t engage you as an errand-boy, and that’s all that concerns us. The thing is to go on as quickly as possible to the fourth time, as I’ve told you before.”

They walked for some distance, but they came across no more shops that wanted a boy, at any rate in the window ; so Augustus decided to ask by the way. He approached a small thin

youth, about four feet nothing high, who was engaged in pouring a shower of bruised Brussels sprouts out of a box into a box on the trestle outside a greengrocer's.

"Does your master want an errand-boy?" said Augustus.

"Whaffor?" said the youth, carefully pouring out the last sprout.

"Does he, I ask you?" said Augustus loudly.

"No, 'e don't want a *boy* exactly," said the youth, "but I 'ave 'eard 'im arskin' once or twice for a couple of young dooks or so, if you 'appen to know of any about as 'ud like a sitoo-ation at tuppence a week all found excep' a good deal as is lorst an' 'ad better not be looked for."

Augustus Clickson turned purple with rage, and what would have happened next it would be hard to say had not John hastily and politely interfered. "We aren't dukes," he said, "and we are sorry to interrupt you, but we only want to know whether your master wants an errand boy if you wouldn't mind just telling us."

"The reel question is," said the youth, "would any errand boy want *'im*."

“Isn’t he nice?” said John.

“Nice,” echoed the youth. “Oh yes, ’e’s as nice as they make ’em. ’Its you as soon as he sees you, ’e does, an’ sometimes sooner.”

“Then why do you stay with him?” said John, surprised.

“Because my father’s workin’ off a debt with me instead of with ’imself, that’s why,” said the youth. “But Lor’ bless you, *I* don’t mind. I’ll be even with the boss some day all right. You look at that for an arm,” said the youth, and he rolled up his shirt sleeves and showed an arm which was wrist all the way up to the shoulder except for a small lump, which, when the youth clenched his fist very firmly, arose above the elbow. “There’s muscle for you,” said the youth, proudly. “I’ll be even with ’im yet, you’ll see. Lor’ bless you, there ain’t nothink a man can’t find ’is way out of, if ’e ’as the ’eart of an ’en. I’m learning Jew-its-you at the Christian Ass. Gym. where they learn it you so as to be able to ’it the Jews for not bein’ Christians, but you can use it on other people besides Jews, you can. I ain’t goin’ to stay in Under long—I’m goin’ out into the world, I am—but before I leave I’m goin’ to knock ’im dahn.

'E's goin' to be sorry e' ever touched me, the day I leave, 'e is——"

"Now then, what's all this 'ere?" said a loud voice behind them, and the youth suddenly began pouring all the bruised Brussels sprouts back into the box from which he had just been pouring them, which was doubtless why, since he seemed to do it rather often, the Brussels sprouts were so bruised; while John and Augustus turned hastily to find themselves face to face with an unusually large red Greengrocer.

"What are you doin' 'ere?" said the Greengrocer. "Be orf with you, wastin' my lad's time."

"Do you want an errand-boy?" said Augustus hastily, while John clasped the Charm firmly in his left hand, and swept his right from his forehead to the ground.

"I don't want a dancin' master, any'ow," said the Greengrocer, staring at John. "The thing is, what do *you* want?"

"I want a place, at least *I* don't, but my friend does, at least he doesn't *this* time," said Augustus, losing his head at the sudden fierceness of the Greengrocer's inquiry.

Not till they had hurried round the corners

of two streets did they feel themselves really beyond the reach of the Greengrocer's terrible roar; but even as he fled, John caught the defiant wink of the youth as he continued to pour Brussels sprouts out of a box into a box. Considering how much bigger the Greengrocer was than the youth, there appeared to be great courage in the latter's diligent and hopeful study of the best method of knocking the Greengrocer down.

Augustus, however, when John remarked something to this effect on their first breathless slackening, was unable to take any view of the matter except a furious one. He said that if anything of that sort ever happened again, he should go home at once.

"Well, I only thought that he and that little tailor both seemed to be finding ways of out their difficulties all right," said John.

"The only way out that *I* shall find myself if this kind of thing goes on," said Augustus, indignantly, "is the way home, and so I tell you."

It was quite ten minutes before he began to recover from his indignation, but the thought that the Charm must certainly be working since

nobody could be further than they were from getting the second situation they had asked for, began, at last, to exercise a soothing influence upon him : and they shortly proceeded on their way.

They had now crossed the river, and were gradually coming into a part of the city which lay towards its outskirts on the plains. It was an even poorer and dirtier part than Down Street ; and, in the high dark houses with which it was crowded, several families lived together in one room, and most of them frequently died there. It was not a part in which John and Augustus would ever have thought of trying for a situation had there been any chance of their getting it, but, under the circumstances, it did not really seem to matter much in what sort of a district they put the third trial of the Charm behind them. So, not coming across any shop that advertised the want of a boy, they went into one to advertise themselves ; and the look of the shop and of the street it was in, made them decide to go in together. It was a long, low tunnel of a place, very dark, and crammed with the strangest confusion of articles that John and Augustus had ever seen. There was nothing

new in it from end to end, and nothing clean. It looked as though large numbers of people had picked out the oldest and dirtiest things they could find in their dust-heaps and rammed them into the shelves; and the oldest and dirtiest thing in the whole shop was the owner himself. At first, John and Augustus, coming in from the light of the street, could not find him in the darkness, but they caught sight of him suddenly, and it gave them rather a shock. He was sitting hunched together on a high stool in the highest corner behind the counter, glaring at them and biting his nails. His long grey hair hung round his yellow face, and lay on his humped shoulders; and his nose had a bigger hump than his shoulders. When he saw the boys had seen him, he bit at his nails harder than ever, and cried what sounded like: "Washer want? Washer want?"

Augustus was a little taken aback, and, remaining where he was, put his hands in his pockets, and leapt thoughtfully on high; but John had had longer acquaintance with the strange people that live among the poor. He advanced, clasped the Charm, swept his right hand from his forehead to the ground, and said: "Do you want a boy, please—an errand boy?"

“Go away, Gentile child that bowest as bow the children of my race,” said the old man in a hoarse, impatient voice. “Errant, errant! no, I want no errant.”

John thought that he had perhaps not been quite rightly understood. “I mean a boy to do errands—or run messages,” he explained.

The old man’s countenance suddenly changed: his eyes suddenly flashed. He scrambled down from the stool, snatched from it something upon which he had been sitting, and came hobbling round the counter, with a face of furious eagerness, stammering and chattering. “Yes, yes,” he cried, seizing John by the arm, “I want message run. I encage thee, I encage thee. I gif’ thee fifteen shillings week. What shall I do, an’ me alone in the house with even the fool Anna away. I encage thee, now at once I encage thee.”

At this surprising and utterly unexpected result of their application, John and Augustus completely lost their heads. Augustus could think of nothing to say but “My gracious,” and John could think of nothing at all.

“I encage thee, I tell thee, I encage thee,” cried the old man, shaking John’s arm in furious

excitement. "Why dost thou not answer? See, I want message run. Go. Take this parcel. Go to the end of this street, take first turn right and first turn left to the river, and on the wharf thou shalt find seated a girl, a child with a blue and a red ribbon in her hair and but one shoe. Give her this, and say to her: 'Jabez the Jeweller says they're up.' And should anyone run after thee, run, run, for the sake of our father Abraham."

John and Augustus stood lost in bewilderment at these extraordinary commands, and the old man shook John's arm again in wild impatience.

"Art thou deaf? Art thou deaf?" he cried.

John opened his mouth to stammer out a refusal of the errand, but he did not know what to say. He had asked for a place as an errand boy, and he had got it, and here was his first errand. He could not think of any reason to give for refusing it. The old man thrust the parcel upon him, and he took it mechanically. It was flat, and sewn up in waterproof canvas, and as John took it, it rustled and creaked.

"Understand, understand," whispered the old man, his eyes gleaming with anxiety and eagerness, "I encage thee now. Fifteen, twenty

shillings week shalt thou have, if thou wilt but run this message quick, quick. What shall I do, with even my old fool daughter away, and no one in the house, and these Gentile dogs afoot that root out a man's house like the dogs they are, and may find even what they do not know is there! Say what I have told thee, that I may know thou knowest."

"To the end of the street, and the first to the right, and the first to the left—to the river," stammered John.

"And there a child, Rachel, the daughter of Elihu, the son of Elihu, the son of mine ancient friend, on whom be peace," said the old man, "to whom thou shalt give this. And what sayest thou to her?"

"Jabez the Jeweller says they're up," said John.

"Then go, go, and our father Abraham go with thee, for I can no more," said the old man, pushing them to the door, "and should anyone run after thee, run, run, run!" He thrust them out on the pavement, and slammed the shop door behind him.

Augustus and John walked some paces mechanically along the pavement in sheer bewilderment before they paused and looked at each other.

“What are we going to do now?” said John.

“He didn’t give the Charm *time* to work,” said Augustus Clickson, drawing an agitated breath. “That must have been it. It will work when we come back. We’d better just go and do what he wants, since he seems in such a fuss about it, and then come back and give the Charm a chance of working.”

“Suppose it *doesn’t* work,” said John, gazing at Augustus Clickson. “Suppose I’ve got to go on being an errand boy to that awful old man for ever and ever. I don’t see how I can say I won’t—when it’s a pound a week.”

Augustus Clickson was spared the difficulty of concealing the fact that the same misgiving was troubling his own breast. They had gained the end of the street in which the shop stood, and, as they took the first turn to the right, John happened to glance behind him. He started.

“There’s a man at the end of the street beginning to run this way, Clickson,” he said. “Do you think he can be coming after us?”

“My gracious,” said Augustus; “I don’t think we’d better wait to find out;” and they took to their heels without another word. They were both able to run fast, Augustus because he

had learnt how to carry his weight at his public school, and John because he had so little weight to carry. They went shoulder to shoulder down the street in which they found themselves. There were few people about, and, in any event, the spectacle of two boys running was not one to interest anybody who did not know what they were running for. They came nearly to the end of the street, but they could see no opening to the left in the houses ahead of them. The walls and windows still stood high, and dark, and unbroken.

"There is no turn to the left," gasped Augustus, slackening angrily. John slackened too, for a moment—and in that moment the pursuing feet drew nearer.

"Perhaps there's a way out at the very end," said John, hastening forward again ; and the next moment he cried : " This must be it. Come on."

Between the houses, so hidden and low that it could only be seen, even by quick eyes, when one was abreast of it, a narrow passage ran down to the left. It was a stone-paved alley, which wound between the backs of factories, and, being used entirely by factory hands, was now quite empty, work having ceased for the day. John

and Augustus followed it in haste, their feet echoing on the flags. At last it took a sudden turn to the right, and John and Augustus, swinging round the corner, saw the river lying wide before them, a shimmering expanse of water. The alley ran out on to a deserted wharf, surrounded by half ruined and empty old warehouses; and, on the river wall at the edge of the wharf, there sat a little girl facing the alley entrance, with a blue ribbon tying up a curl on one side of her dark head, and a red ribbon tying up a curl on the other, and with one bare foot hanging against the wall.

John and Augustus came to an abrupt stop. This could be none other than Rachel, the daughter of Elihu, the son of Elihu, the son of the old man's ancient friend. There were the red ribbon and the blue ribbon, and the bare foot that hung against the wall. Besides, there was nobody else in sight. The little wharf lay absolutely empty in the sunlight, and the lane that led away from it along the river ran by more half-ruined warehouses, and was as empty as the wharf. This was a part of the city which had once been prosperous, but trade and traffic had left it for the great docks and wharfs that

had been built on the wider curve of the river in the centre of the town ; and now only the rats used the warehouses, and the only keels that crossed the water were those of a few old boats that plied as ferries. One of these, on a rusting chain, was bumping gently in the running tide against the river wall, but there was no waterman in her, and no one save the little girl in sight. She sat quite still, gazing at them with a fascinated and horrified gaze from a pair of sorrowful dark eyes. John and Augustus looked at each other, and then John advanced. "Jabez the Jeweller says they're up," he said, and he held out the parcel ; while Augustus put his hands in his pockets and, with a thoughtful aspect, leapt on high.

"Oh dear me, oh dear me," said the little girl, and she gave a kind of howl of sorrow, and slipped off the wall.

"Are you Rachel ?" said John. He remembered her by the dark eyes that had gazed at him a few days before under the gas-lamp in Down Street. But she took no notice of him. She ran across the wharf with the package, and hammered despairingly at the closed door of one of the warehouses.

“ William, William,” she cried. “ Come out, William. They’re up.”

The door opened very slightly, and an alarmed voice said : “ ‘Ush, for ‘eaven’s sake, you’ll rouse the ‘ole neighbourhood.”

“ There’s no neighbourhood to rouse,” said the little girl. “ Come out, come out.”

The door opened a little wider, and a young man put out a head exactly like the head of a white rat, and looked anxiously about him.

“ ‘Oo’s them two ? ” he ejaculated in alarm, drawing back as he caught sight of John and Augustus.

“ Those are only the boys that brought it,” said the little girl.

“ Brought what ? ” said the young man, with a start.

“ The packet,” said the little girl. “ Jabez says they’re up, and we must take the papers to the Inn.”

“ Oh Lord, oh Lord, and what about the upstairs lodger ? ” groaned the young man ; “ but let’s get out of this,” and he burst out of the warehouse, and rushed across the wharf, with the little girl pattering close behind him ; and before John and Augustus could realise what

they were about, they had loosed the old boat, scrambled into her, and cast her off. The young man seized the oars, and rowed furiously away, while the little girl sat in the stern with the packet in her folded arms, rocking over it as though it were a pain. "Oh dear me, oh dear me," John and Augustus heard her say as the boat, rolling under the fury of the young man's rowing, disappeared down the river into the haze of the summer evening. John and Augustus, left alone on the wharf, looked at each other.

"Let's get out of this, too," said Augustus, emphatically. "And the sooner we do it the better, and so I tell you. I don't believe that old man had any right to that packet, nor we any right to help him get rid of it."

They returned up the alley at full speed. Their errand, whatever it might have been, was done. The next thing was to go and say as much, and give the Charm its chance of working. They could only hope it *would* work, and at once. It had led them into one sufficiently strange adventure already. No one so much as glanced at them on the way back, and they saw no more of the man whom they had seen running: which was little wonder, since he was still searching

for them with all his might half a mile beyond the passage entrance to the alley. They reached the shop, and entered it. The old man sat on his high stool behind the counter. He was biting his nails fiercely, and glaring out from between the strands of his grey hair like a wild animal. One policeman stood in the middle of the shop, and another by the door. The shop had evidently been ransacked. All kinds of queer cupboards and holes, of the openings of which John and Augustus had never seen a sign, now stood gaping in the dim light; and of all the hundreds of things that had been crammed on the counters and into the shelves there was not one left. They were all on the floor, and the large policeman in the middle rose out of them like a blue mountain out of a sea. John and Augustus came to a dismayed stop, but the subordinate policeman by the door, thinking them customers, merely made them a sign to come no further for the moment. His superior officer had nearly finished his speech, and they were just about to depart.

“ You’ll do it once too often you know, Jabez, my man,” the man in the middle was saying with an aspect of lofty but benevolent warning.

"You've slipped us again this time, but the trap's closing, and there's few fish we don't tree sooner or later when we know as much about 'em as we do about you. You may tell your daughter and that there little ward of your's, that the perlissee of Under knows as well as most people what it is they 'ave to do for you whether they want to or not, and they know all about that foreigner as 'as been 'anging round your shop, inter the bargain. An' the heyes of the perlissee of Under," said the policeman, loftily, "once being on a scent, can follow it up till it's safe in the net, let it struggle ever so."

"That they can, George," said the policeman by the door, admiringly.

"Haff I stopped your search? haff I hidden aught? haff I not opened all?" said the old man, with bitter sarcasm, his narrowed eyes fixed with triumphant contempt on the policeman. "Search for the jewels, search, search, vile persecutors of the innocent who leave my poor place in ruins!"

"That'll do, Jabez, my man, that'll do," said the large policeman, and he strode to the door, casting no more than a glance at John and Augustus as he passed them. Had the plain-clothes detective, who was even then rushing

down far-off streets under the delusion that he was still chasing John and Augustus, but managed to reach the corner before they found that turning to the left, the policeman might not have passed them so casually. As he went by them, the old man cast a sudden glance of keen anxiety at John and Augustus, first at their hands, and then at their faces. Then he sank together on his stool in silence, and sat staring at the floor.

When the door had closed, complete quiet reigned in the shop. The old man continued to sit plunged in thought, passive and relaxed, and so deeply preoccupied that the boys almost feared to disturb him. But when John approached, he looked up, and the glare flashed back into his eyes.

“Washer want, washer want?” he said, irritably.

“We gave that parcel to the little girl all right,” said John. The old man stared at him.

“Parcel, girl,” he repeated. “Vot talk is this? I know no girl, no parcel. The child is stricken.”

John and Augustus were so taken aback they knew not what to say. They stood and stared, and the old man added angrily: “If you haf

not come to sell aught but merely to talk foolishness, begone, I say. I am busy."

"But you engaged me as your errand boy," said the astonished John.

"Me! You!" ejaculated the old man, staring. "The child is certainly stricken. I have never laid eyes on thee before."

John and Augustus looked at each other blankly.

Astonishment obliterated every other consideration. "But you *have* laid eyes on me before," said John. "You engaged me as your errand boy at a pound a week."

"Yes, you did and so I tell you," said Augustus.

The old man sprang from his stool. "*I*," he shrieked, "I engage thee at a pound a week! This is servindle! This is to extort money. Begone, impostors, ere I drive ye forth with blows! Begone I say." He seized a stick and flourished it wildly, his hair streaming out round his head, his eyes flaming with fury; and John and Augustus, so astonished that they hardly knew what they were doing, hastened in consternation from the shop.

Such was their surprise that they traversed

several streets at a considerable speed before the tumult of their feelings calmed down sufficiently to allow of cooler thought and consideration. Then it dawned upon them that, in spite of the astonishing circumstances which had attended its working, the third trial of the Charm lay behind them and the Charm itself was certainly in action, since no one could be further than they were from obtaining the situation they had asked for.

But the shadow of the cliff lay by now dark over the city. In all the streets the shops were beginning to close for the night. It was too late to start again that evening, especially as it was the fourth trial of the Charm that now had to be undertaken, and no haste or mistake must be allowed to endanger it. So they arranged to meet at the usual place and hour next day, and Augustus then rushed up Wickle Hill, and John returned to Down Street. Old Mother Letitlie was sitting in her doorway as he went by.

“Good evening,” said John politely.

“Good evening,” said old Mother Letitlie, continuing to gaze gloomily at Down Street.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FAILURE OF THE FOURTH

By a quarter past five on Tuesday evening, John and Augustus were already in the city, considering the site, size and appearance of a large number of shops. On several occasions they made opportunities for considering the size and appearance of the shopkeepers also—greatly to the indignation of the shopkeepers. These outbursts of wrath at the sudden vision of peering faces at their swing doors, however, pleased Augustus Clickson. “It’s a very good way of finding out whether they’ve got tempers or not,” he observed, leaping approvingly outside an establishment whence he and John had just fled precipitately; and tempers they certainly most of them seemed to have.

At last John and Augustus came to the conclusion that a shop to which they had several times returned for its further consideration really did seem to be the best available. It was

the kind of shop in which, if one had to be a shop boy at all, one could best bear being one. It was a stationer's shop, not too far from Down Street, and it stood in a clean little street that led from the market-place to the street by the railways and was itself clean and well fitted. It was not too large, so the work was not likely to be too hard; and its long thin shopkeeper had an apathetic and melancholy countenance which gave no promise of sudden rage, chiefly because it gave no promise of anything at all. He came out once himself to inspect something on one of his newspaper placards, so they had an opportunity of inspecting him in his turn, of which they took such full advantage that he became uncomfortable and retired nervously within the shop. A card with "Boy wanted" hung in the window. All seemed suitable. So Augustus stationed himself on the edge of the pavement a few doors down, and John walked in. The Stationer was engaged in serving a customer with one sheet of grey Silurian notepaper and an envelope to match. He had a somewhat embittered air, but then there was nothing calculated to exhilarate him very greatly in the business he was transacting. While he waited, John

fell to wondering why a stationer should be called a stationer seeing that he was not necessarily any more stationary than any other shopkeeper; and while he was occupied with this problem, the customer left the shop, and a voice said darkly after a moment's pause, "If you're goin' to spend an hour thinkin' what you've come for, young man, I'd sooner you spent it outside."

"I beg your pardon," said John, hastily emerging from his reverie. "Do you want an errand boy, please?"

"No, I don't," said the Stationer morosely. "Now go along out."

"But the card in your window says you do," said John, surprised at the gloom and resolution of the Stationer's tone. His surprise was apparently shared by somebody else, for before the Stationer could answer, the curtained glass door at the back of the little shop suddenly opened slightly and the voice of some unseen person remarked with strenuous cheerfulness through the crack, "Now 'Enery, 'Enery! Look on the bright side of things, 'Enery!"

"I *am* lookin' on the bright side of things, Hemmer," called the Stationer in a goaded

manner. "So long as you stay the side of the door you are, I can go *on* a-lookin' at 'em." He added resentfully to John, "'Ow can I 'elp what the card in my window says? Me and the card in my window is two very different things. Will you go along out?" John was so much disconcerted and surprised that he did begin to go along out, and the Stationer's voice pursued him. "I put that there card in my window the day afore the Radicals come in. Now that they *har* in, I can't afford no boy, an' I let people come in and ask me why I can't, so that I may 'ave the chanst of *tellin'* 'em why I can't. Now you know and you can go along out."

"But it's so misleading to say in your window that you want a boy when you don't," said John, pausing to remonstrate.

"There's nothink misleadin' about it," said the Stationer with some heat. "Is the trewth misleadin', I ask you? I *do* want a boy, an' me with the ole shop on my 'ands. I'd 'ave five boys to-morrer if I could afford 'em. Now will you go along out?"

John moved slowly to the door, pondering in much confusion. He felt sure the Stationer was

labouring under some deep and fundamental error with regard to the card in his window, but he could not quite make out, in the mingled feelings of the moment, what the error was; and while he walked confusedly towards the exit, the glass-door opened again slightly, and a voice said in strenuous exhortation: "'Enery, 'Enery, you don't sound to me as if you was looking on the bright side of things. Remember what the doctor said, 'Enery."

"Show me a bright side of things to look *hat*, Hemmer," cried the Stationer, in a yet more goaded manner.

A dead silence ensued on the further side of the glass door. Emma had apparently never expected this contingency, and was unable to cope with it. After a long pause the voice said in subdued and uncertain accents, "Well, we mightn't be 'ere at all, 'Enery."

"An' which 'ud be the bright side of *that*, Hemmer," cried the Stationer.

There was another long pause, and then the glass door slowly closed.

"Got 'er!" said the Stationer, in mingled depression and triumph, "I'm always a gettin' of 'er, poor creacher. But it's a dreadful thing

for a man to 'ave a wife as will cheer 'im up. *Will* you go along out."

But John, in contemplating the Stationer's error, had, with a violent start, suddenly remembered his own. "I *am* an ass," he said vigorously. He turned about, gripped the Charm firmly in his left hand, stood on both his feet, and swept his right hand from his forehead towards the ground. "Do you want an errand boy, please?" he said, confidently. The Stationer was so much surprised that at first he only stared, whereupon John repeated his words and movement.

"You're mad," said the Stationer, with dreadful conviction. "Don't you make signs at me, because I won't have it. 'Ere's a nice thing to 'ave 'appen to a man."

"I'm not mad," said John, aghast that such an interpretation should have seized upon the mind of the Stationer.

"You are," said the Stationer. "You're as mad as an 'atter. Go away."

"I am truly not mad," said John earnestly. "I only think that if you will only think a moment you'll find you want an errand boy."

"If I thought for five year," said the Stationer,

greatly agitated, "I shouldn't find I wanted *you*. 'Ere's a nice thing to 'ave 'appen to a man. Go away. Go away quiet at once."

This was so strangely different to anything John had expected that he could hardly believe his ears. After staring in bewilderment at the Stationer for a moment, he determined to try again, lest there could by any chance have been some mistake in his rendering of the Charm. He closed his hand tightly round it, stood on both feet, bent his head, swept his right hand in a vigorous semi-circle from his forehead to the ground, and said firmly as if he had never said it before. "Do you want an errand boy, please?"

"Don't you make signs at *me*, I tell you," cried the Stationer, departing hastily to the other end of the shop. "I won't 'ave it."

"I'm *not* making signs at you," said John, desperately.

"You are," said the Stationer, plunging into the profoundest gloom. "'Ere's a nice thing to 'ave 'appen to a man. As if I 'adn't enough to bear already! Mad men loose in Parlyment an' mad boys loose in the street! What's England coming to? The next thing'll be, that you'll go

dangerous. I know. Now I shall 'ave to 'umour you or you'll go dangerous. Look 'ere, my lad, I don't want a boy myself, or I'd take you an' 'appy, for a pleasanter lad I never see. But the baker in the next street, 'e'd give 'is ears to 'ave a boy. Five girls in family they are, and the larst twins. You go on an' make signs at the baker. 'E'd enjoy it, 'e would. It's the kind of thing 'e does enjoy. You go away quiet and make signs at the baker."

John stood gazing at him helplessly, and at that instant the glass door opened slightly once more, and a voice as of one determined to ignore all set-backs and continue in the path of cheerfulness however difficult, said, "Now, 'Enery, 'Enery, you don't sound to me as if you was lookin' at the bright side of things, 'Enery."

The Stationer literally tore at his hair and danced with rage at the further end of the shop, but he restrained himself sufficiently to groan encouragement to John, as the latter, seeing no other course open to him, began to move slowly away.

"*That's* right! *Out* you go. *Out* you go quiet and shut the door be'ind you. Oh, what a thing to 'ave 'appen to a man," groaned the

Stationer, and at this juncture the glass door suddenly opened altogether, and a stout woman appeared on the threshold. She stood and beamed in the doorway for several seconds before the attitude and position of the Stationer dawned upon her. Then she said with mild surprise, "Whatever are you doin' of over there, 'Enery?"

"I'm over 'ere because there's a mad boy over there, Hemmer," replied the Stationer with dignity. "An' a better reason could 'ardly be."

"Mad?" ejaculated the stout woman with a faint start. "Where?"

"There," said the Stationer.

"Oh, there," said the stout woman, gazing at John.

"Yes, there," said the Stationer. "Mad as an 'atter."

"I'm not mad," said John, pausing in despairing indignation. "I only want him to engage me as an errand boy."

"An' why don't you engage the little boy, 'Enery, if 'e wants you to?" said the stout woman, benevolently. "I'm sure he seems a perlite little boy enough. Every time I looked through the glass door while I was ironin', there

'e was, a-bowin' an' a-bowin' till it reelly seemed as if 'e could 'ardly leave it orf. Why don't you engage the little boy, 'Enery? I'm sure I have often said to you I wished you would engage a little boy. It would cheer you up to 'ave a little boy——”

“*Will* you mind your own business, Hemmer?” said the Stationer, wildly. “I can't afford to engage no boy, least of all a mad one.”

“I'm not mad,” cried John.

“You are,” cried the Stationer.

The stout woman glanced with slight bewilderment and undiminished benevolence from one to the other and continued upon her way as if nothing had occurred to stop her in it. “——'ave a little boy, now the doctor says you've got to be cheered up for the nerves, 'Enery, an' as for not affordin' it, why we're turning over as much now as ever we was, an' we've always 'ad a little boy, though of course I know it's gone to your 'ead since the larst little boy that the Radicals 'ave got into Parlyment, 'Enery, but if you'd only try and look at the bright side of things, I'm sure you might find a way——”

At this moment there was a terrific crash, and the stout woman leapt in the doorway with a

shriek. The Stationer, goaded beyond endurance, had hurled a large roll of newspapers across the shop, whether at John, or the stout woman, or merely into space, did not appear. It hit *The Lady* full in the face, and the stand containing that periodical and many others came with force to the ground.

"Perreps you'd better go away, little boy," said the stout woman, recovering herself with a sigh. "I'm sure I never see a perliter little boy, but 'e *will* set an' look at the dark side of things."

But John, much shaken by this violent evidence that the Charm was not exerting so much as the faintest influence on the mind of the Stationer, was already gone.

"You *have* been an age," said Augustus Clickson, hastening to meet him as he emerged from the shop. "How much will it be a week?"

"It won't be anything a week," said John, gazing at Augustus. "He won't have me."

"What!" said Augustus, staring back at John in blank amazement.

"He won't have me," said John.

"Won't have you!" echoed Augustus. "But he *must*."

"He won't," said John. "He can't afford a

boy now the Radicals are in. At least he says it's that, but his wife says it's because he will sit and look at the dark side of things."

"But it's the fourth time we've tried," cried Augustus at the top of his voice.

"I know it is," said John. "And when I did the Charm at him he thought I was mad."

They gazed at each other a moment in silence. The Hawker had fooled them. The Charm was nonsense. There was nothing more to be said.

This did not prevent Augustus from saying a great deal, however. He burst into a booming beside which all his other boomings were as summer breezes beside a gale. He said at the top of his voice that the whole thing was utter rot and he had thought so from the very beginning, and that the succeeding of the Miller's Charm had been nothing but a fluke, and he had never believed in it whatever anybody else had been fool enough to do, and if anybody wanted to go on believing in it, they could go on by themselves, because he, Augustus, had had enough of it, and he was going home at once and so he told him.

John watched Augustus rush home. It appeared to him to be just the moment in which he would

most have wished Augustus to stay. But the chief thing of which you could be sure in Augustus Clickson during a crisis was that you could not be quite sure of him, and when once he had departed booming there was nothing for it but to wait till he came half-way back by himself and then go out and try to bring him the rest of the way. Till an opportunity of doing this occurred, however, there was nothing to be done at all but to depart oneself.

So John went home. He walked along silently and swiftly. As he went down Down Street he met the Ironmonger's son. Since that rapid and decisive encounter with Augustus Clickson in the dusk the Ironmonger's son had not only never jeered at John when he met him, however, but had never even seen him when he saw him; and he now walked by in lofty unconsciousness.

Old Mother Letitlie looked out from her doorway as John passed. "And where do you come from now, John Hazard?" said she.

"From nowhere in particular," said John resignedly.

"Been trying to find a job again and haven't found it, I'll be bound," said Mother Letitlie, darkly. "You'd a great deal better make up

your mind that it's a black world and bear with it. However, it's the same to *me* if you like all this stroodling in and out for nothing."

"I don't like it," said John Hazard. "I'm not going to do it any more."

He went on. When he reached No. 179, he went sorrowfully indoors and up to bed, taking no notice of anything or anybody upon his way. It was no use taking notice of anything. He never meant to again. In Down Street and in poverty and a black world they must all just go on living as best they might, and leave off being geniuses when the time came, and leave off being gentlefolk too if they had to. It was much best to let——"John!" called his mother's voice from the bottom of the stairs, and John paused in his undressing, and went to the door and answered her.

"I wanted to tell you that a man came to see you this evening, John darling," said his mother's voice up the stairs.

"Who was he?" said John.

"I don't know," said his mother. "He had a load of staves on his back, but he did not seem to want to sell anything. He came to the door and rang the bell, and when I answered it

all he said was, 'Tell John Hazard I was here,' and then he went away."

"Oh," said John. "All right. Thanks."

"Was he anybody that mattered?" said his mother.

"No," said John. He retired into his room again, and shut the door, and went on undressing. Nobody could matter so little as the Hawker. He mattered so little that John never meant to think of him again. He got into bed, and lay there in the dusk, staring at the wall; and while he lay looking, the shape of the window suddenly came out in light on the twilit wallpaper, and the curtains moved softly out into the room and fell back again. The shadow of the cliff was beginning to advance over the city. The lamps were being lit, and the wind from the hills had begun to blow through the streets.

John turned his face from the window, and shut his eyes. Every time he left off thinking about the Hawker something happened to make him think of him again. The wind among the hanging things on the market stalls, the wind blowing down Down Street at midnight when all the world was asleep, the wind rushing over the tree-tops above the stillness of the woods

—it could not so much as move the curtains now without bringing with it the vision of a figure walking down the narrow ways of the market, or standing under the gas-lamp of an empty street, or sitting among the bracken in the far away twilight on the hills. And it was the figure of nothing more than an ordinary cheating street Hawker, of a common knave who fooled people on purpose, of a——

A sudden thought flashed into John's mind, and arrested all the other thoughts passing through it. He opened his eyes. *Did* the Hawker fool people on purpose—or did he not? He turned the question over and over, unable to decide it and unable to dismiss it. A question it certainly was, though it had never occurred to him as one before.

Suppose the Hawker did not fool people on purpose? Suppose it was the Hawker who was the fool? Suppose he really believed in the Charms he gave his customers, and would be as much surprised at their failure as his customers themselves could be? Then there could be no denying that it would be a very different matter; and one that must be taken differently. If the Hawker honestly believed himself to have

given them something that would ensure them success, he might be wondering at that very moment why they did not come to tell him if it had done so or not. Perhaps that was why he had come to Down Street that evening—to remind them that they had not yet kept their promise to him. And the fact remained that, in any event, he had given them the Charm for nothing. Whether it was a Charm or no, it was a good sound carved staff that would have sold for money in the markets of Under.

John came to the conclusion that, all things considered, it would be better to return the Charm politely as if it were really a Charm. To treat a person as a knave, when he might be nothing but a fool, would be unfair and unkind. Nobody could help being a fool. John composed himself resignedly anew to sleep.

Meanwhile Augustus Clickson remained in lofty indignation on Wickle Hill, and this indeed was just as well. If the Charm had to be returned as if it were really a Charm, it was a matter John must carry out alone. There was not the faintest hope that Augustus could be induced to look upon it in anything even approaching a calm and happy spirit, and it was therefore

better that it should be safely disposed of before the arrival of Saturday afternoon when, judging from past experience, John had hopes that Augustus, finding himself lonely, might descend from Wickle Hill and the heights of his indignation, even if he boomed slightly while he did so.

So John started at five next day straight from the school door for the precipice of Under without returning home even for his tea. There was no market in Under on Wednesdays, so it was useless looking for the Hawker in the markets, and even if he travelled as fast as he could from then on, he could not hope to get back from the hills till late. He climbed the waterfall with the Charm fastened to his back by the belt of his Norfolk jacket; and started up the slopes. When he reached the little house in the glade between the dark close-standing trees, a glance told him that he had come in vain. The door was shut, and the chain up.

John stood still in resigned vexation. Now he would have to go searching for the Hawker in the markets again on the morrow, and if he failed to find him there, he must come all the way up to the glade once more. He debated

whether it would not do just as well if he stood the Charm up against the door, and left it there. The Hawker would probably conclude that it had worked successfully, and that they had come to the glade to tell him so, and not finding him, had left the Charm there that it might tell its own tale and be ready in case he wanted to give it to somebody else who also needed help in difficulty. That was as good a conclusion as any for him to come to. At any rate, he would see that they had made a polite effort to find him, which, after all, was the chief thing. So John advanced towards the little house to carry out this purpose, and at that moment he heard a footstep on the turf, and round the corner of the little house came a woman carrying a basket. She started when she saw John.

"It's only me," said John reassuringly.

"You startled me very much," said the woman, sighing. "Do you know if this is where the Hawker lives—the Hawker who sells staves and Charms?"

"Yes," said John. "This is it, but he's not here."

"I knew he wouldn't be," said the woman, the tears springing to her eyes, "I never can

remember things turning out just as I want them to, and what shall I do now ? ”

She set down the basket to dry her eyes. She was dressed in a very tidy dress, and her hair was very smooth, and her hat very neat, and her apron beautifully darned. “ I’ve come all the way up from Under by the railway to find him because he wasn’t in the markets,” she said with tears. “ I’ve been walking up here for hours and hours, and what shall I do now ? ”

“ What was it you *wanted* to do ? ” asked John, soothingly.

“ I wanted to pay him for a Charm he sold me,” said the woman. “ The Hawker isn’t one you dare put off paying longer than you can help, and I never can find him in the markets.”

“ Is it a Charm that has worked ? ” said John.

“ Yes, it’s a Charm that has worked,” said the woman.

“ Couldn’t you perhaps leave him what you’ve brought him since he isn’t here for you to give it him ? ” suggested John.

“ I expect he’d be angry,” said the woman, sighing, “ when I remember how easily men get angry ! ”

"I don't see why he should be angry," said John, considering.

"Well, I'd better leave it, I suppose," said the woman. "I don't know when I shall be able to come all this way again." She picked up her basket, and went towards the doorstep of the little house. "He'll know who it was that left moorland honey on his doorstep for him, anyway," she said, with mournful pride. "Ah, the bees in the heather!" Then John remembered her, in spite of her tidiness and her smoothness and her mended apron.

"Does Thomas come back to you now when you call him?" he said.

"Yes, he comes back," said the woman, "but I don't know that it isn't just as bad as when he didn't. You could hardly say he ever goes away now, and the sewing and mending and neatening I have to do to keep the Charm at work and him in the house is enough to make you cry. When I remember how comfortable I was in my father's farm! Still, the other women in the street can't say now that I don't have my husband at home just as much as they do," said the woman, mournfully dabbing at her eyes.

When John went cliffwards through the forest again, the Charm was still in his hand. There was, of course, nothing to show that the success of the mournful woman's Charm had not been as much due to a lucky chance as the success of the miller's Charm had been; but if these lucky chances happened to the Hawker's Charms very often, it was small wonder if he really believed them to be Charms. At any rate there was still more ground now for believing that he did believe in them than there had been before; and while to leave payment for a Charm on a doorstep was quite a polite and right thing to do, to leave a Charm itself there, without thanks or explanation, was hardly the way to return his gift to a man who had given it in good faith.

It took less time to come down from the hills than it did to go up into them, but even so, it was dark when John set foot on the waste lands again, and the wind was sighing along the paths between the rubbish heaps. He crossed the station bridge and came out into the street by the railways. All the shops and offices of the city were closing, and numbers of people who lived in the suburbs and wanted to get back to

them by train, were rushing across the street and into the station.

John was making his way slowly against the stream when he heard a voice near him say loudly, "Stop, my man, stop. I forgot to get Mariamne a stick in town to-day; I want to get Mariamne a stick. I am always explaining to Mariamne the value of domestic pleasures, and I wish to get her a stick to encourage her to take little walks about the garden. Make haste, my man, make haste. My train is due"; and a little to his left he saw the tall figure of the Hawker, towering above the crowds that hurried past him, while another shorter figure danced an impatient dance up and down in front of him.

John waited till the bargain had been concluded and paid for, and the short figure bearing Mariamne's stick had whirled away stationwards on the stream of people; and then he appeared in front of the Hawker, and said "Good evening."

"Good evening," said the Hawker, swinging his load of staves up on to his shoulders.

"I've brought you back the Charm, Hawker," said John.

"Why?" said the Hawker.

"Well, it hasn't quite succeeded," said John.

"Not quite, it hasn't. But Clickson and I don't blame you in the least, Hawker. You said all Charms wouldn't work for everybody, you know, and I expect Clickson and I happen to be the kind of people they won't work for."

"Oh," said the Hawker. He stood a moment in silence, looking at John. "Well, go on," he said.

"And as it wouldn't work for us," said John, "I've brought it back in case you want to give it to somebody else it *will* work for. And thank you very much indeed, Hawker, but Clickson and I rather think we won't bother about it any more. We rather think it will be better just to leave things be now, thanks very much."

"Oh," said the Hawker again, and again he stood looking at John a moment in silence.

"Well," he said, "it will certainly be no fault of yours if you have to decide to turn back after all and go no further."

"No," said John.

"For four separate times have you tried the Charm," said the Hawker, "and each time have you tried your utmost."

"Oh well," said John. "Well, I don't know that we exactly tried our *utmost*, Hawker—at

least we didn't all the four times. You see, we knew it couldn't succeed the first three times, so it wasn't worth while bothering to try. I think we only really tried very hard the last time, as a matter of fact. We——" John paused suddenly, as a perfectly new idea flashed into his mind.

The Hawker, in silence, pulled his load higher up on to his shoulders, and going on towards the station, disappeared in the crowd that was sweeping over the bridge.

"Where've you been?" said old Mother Letitlie, emerging from her dark reflections for a moment as John passed her doorstep later that evening.

"Up the cliff," said John.

"I thought you'd left off stroodling up and down for nothing," said old Mother Letitlie. "There's those about will make you go further than the cliff some day, my lad, unless I'm much mistaken. Go on, go on, go away. Don't stand there on one leg; it makes me nervous," said old Mother Letitlie, gazing out at Down Street.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOUSE OF MARIAMNE

THE next day, as soon as school was over, John set out swiftly to seek Augustus Clickson ; and as he hastened up Wickle Hill, he met Augustus rushing down it. When Augustus perceived John, he stopped short and said, "If you think I was coming down to look for *you*, John Hazard, you're jolly well mistaken, because I wasn't."

"I wasn't thinking anything," said John, "I've got something to tell you."

"What about," said Augustus suspiciously.

"About the Charm," said John.

"The Charm," cried Augustus Clickson, at the top of his voice. "Do you mean to tell me you're still thinking of that beastly rot ! Then you can just go on thinking about it alone, and so I tell you. I was only this minute coming down to find you, but if you're going to go on with that footling game, you can go on with it by yourself, and so I tell you."

"All right, I will," said John, and he left Augustus and returned thoughtfully to his home. Augustus was greatly surprised. It had never occurred to him that anybody could ever seriously bring themselves to leave him.

When John emerged from No. 179 a little later the same evening with his hair brushed and his boots blacked and the Charm in his left hand, the first thing he beheld was Augustus Clickson leaping abstractedly on the edge of the pavement with his hands in his pockets.

"What was it you wanted so much to tell me about that Charm, Hazard?" inquired Augustus mildly when he saw John. So John told him, and the minute it was presented to him, Augustus saw the point. He said immediately that the whole thing was as clear as daylight and it was a great pity John had not thought of it before. There could be no doubt whatever, Augustus said strongly, that they had never given the Charm a chance at all, for you certainly cannot try without trying, and trying was exactly the thing that he and John had never done except once. When he had recovered from the surprise of realizing this, Augustus added that he had felt something of the sort

from the very beginning and that nothing but deference to John's opinion on the folly of trying to do things you knew you couldn't, had prevented him from saying so ages ago.

"Well, where shall we try now?" said John.

That was indeed a question. They walked to the end of Down Street and stood there considering. They had tried every possible place within reach of Down Street and a good many places that were not possible, and where it would be best to go to look for some unknown street where they could try again, it was for the moment difficult to say.

As they stood gazing out on the crowded thoroughfare that passed the end of Down Street, they heard a familiar cry rising above the noise of the traffic: "Staves to sell, staves to sell."

"Hullo, there's the Hawker," said Augustus. "Let's go and see what he's doing down here."

So they threaded their way down the street between the lines of booths, and, not hearing the Hawker's cry again, came up with him so suddenly that they nearly ran into him. He was standing in the middle of the street, his passage barred by two embittered costermongers who, in the energy of a dispute in which nobody they

knew would take any interest, had seized upon the nearest person they did not know and insisted upon his being umpire.

"What I says is," said one costermonger, banging one fist into another, "'e's done me."

"I ain't done 'im," asserted the other costermonger. "I ain't done nobody."

"'E 'as," said the first costermonger. "'E's done me brown. 'Gimme tuppence, Bill,' says 'e to me, 'an' I'll recommeng your Hedward,' says 'e, 'to a sitooation as boot-boy at 20, Wickle 'ill, where 'e does odd jobs, as any nobleman might be proud to accep,' says he. So I gives 'im the tuppence, me bein' willin' to lay out somethink for the boy's career, an' when Hedward went to get the place, they larfed at 'im. 'Is this the way you recommeng my Hedward?' says I to 'im——"

"Get out, you silly hass," said the second costermonger, suddenly losing his patience. "I *did* recommeng your Hedward. 'There'll be a boy comin' arter your place,' says I to the cook, 'oose father I know dahn our way,' says I, 'an' a sillier blighter I never see, an' I expect 'is son's 'is son,' says I. An' if that ain't recommending of a person, I don't know what is."

At this the first costermonger became perfectly frozen, and gazed upon the second costermonger in a dreadful manner that might have portended almost anything, had not a large market cart, which believed itself to be the right size for the street, come crushing down the narrow passage between the booths and obliged everybody to rush for the sides amid a torrent of strong language from those who believed it not to be the right size. John and Augustus and the Hawker and the costermongers were temporarily borne away from each other by the sudden movement; and when the cart had got past two booths by the simple expedient of knocking one of them over, and was pursuing its way down the street with a stream of shouts and screams dividing before the horse's head like waves before a steamer's prow, every one flowed out from the sides into the roadway again, and John and Augustus found themselves near the Hawker.

"Twenty, Wickle Hill," said Augustus, reflectively; "That's next-door to us."

"Is it?" said the Hawker. "Well, if Edward didn't get the boot-boy's place, perhaps it's still to be had."

"Would it do for one of the tries, should you think?" said Augustus, surprised.

"Well, I don't see why not," said the Hawker; and the costermongers having rushed for different sides and not having been able as yet to find each other again, he went on down the street, crying, "Staves to sell, staves to sell."

"Come on," said Augustus. "I know the house quite well. It's only just been let, and the people moved in a day or two ago."

"Do I want to be a boot-boy?" said John thoughtfully.

"No, you don't, and you won't be, or you wouldn't try to be, my good chap," said Augustus Clickson, strongly, "but you've got to try as if you *did* want to be, for all that, and so I tell you. You ought always to have tried like that, and there was your mistake, and I've said so from the very beginning. Come on."

The home of Augustus stood on the top of what was called Wickle Hill, a slight elevation which would probably not have been observed to be a hill anywhere else but in Under. The house was a large and beautiful red building, with gables and Greek pillars, "standing in its own garden," as the advertisements said, though

why they should have troubled to mention that it would be hard to say, since very few houses stand in other people's gardens, of course. However, perhaps they did it because these were the only houses in Under that stood in any gardens at all. Every house in Wickle Hill had its garden; and a back lane with a high wall with red doors in it ran behind them all. John and Augustus went to the red door next to the red door that led into the back garden of Augustus' home, and there Augustus waited, lest the cook should make the same mistake that the shopkeepers had and prefer him to John, and John pushed open the red door and went in. A flagged path led between black currant bushes and scullery dusters to the back door; and John walked along it and knocked. There came a Kitchenmaid instantly and plunged into speech. "If you're the poulterer round the corner," she said rapidly, "it's no good, because we're Stores."

"I'm not the poulterer round the corner," said John surprised.

"Well, it's no good if you're anythink," said the Kitchenmaid. "I'm sure we've 'ad all the shops in Under call already, but Master's that suspicious 'e will be Stores."

“ I’m sorry he will be Stores if you don’t want him to be,” said John, politely ; “ but what I came to ask was, would I do for a boot-boy, do you think ? ” and he clasped the Charm and swept his right hand from his forehead to the ground.

The Kitchenmaid surveyed him for a moment with immense surprise and interest ; then she shrieked, “ Cook, Cook, I say. Come ’ere, Cook,” and the Cook came hurrying with a ladle in her hand and looked over the kitchenmaid’s shoulder.

“ ’Ere’s the Prince of Wales in disguise, Cook, an’ will ’e do for bewt-boy, do you think ? ” said the Kitchenmaid.

“ I’m not the Prince of Wales in disguise,” said John, hastily.

“ Ah, ’is parients is fell in the world, I expect,” said the Cook, sighing.

“ *Is* they fell in the world, my boy ? ” inquired the Kitchenmaid, with romantic interest.

“ No, yes, no,” said John. “ Would I do for boot-boy, do you think ? ”

Neither of the persons he addressed took the least notice of his question. The Cook said dreamily, “ ’E’s very different to the larst one

as come, isn't 'e, Heller? And if there *is* a thing I 'ave a nankering after it's a curl in the 'air"; and the Kitchenmaid replied sympathetically, "Ah, pore thing, you would do."

John looked at them with the greatest uneasiness, and stood on one leg. Nothing but the memory of the condition attached to the success of the Charm kept him from departing forthwith—so sentimentally did they lean upon each other and with such a far-away smile did they regard him.

"I can clean knives," he said, standing upon the other leg, "and boots."

Whereupon the Cook sighed again and remarked, "And as to a pretty manner, Heller, let a person 'ave a pretty manner, an' it's all I arsk," and the Kitchenmaid sighed also and replied, "So it is all *I* do."

John waited another moment, and finding that neither of them seemed capable of coming to the business in hand, he brought them to it himself, with what firmness he could.

"Well, I don't think it's all you *ought* to ask," he said. "There are a great many things that are far more important in a boot-boy. You don't even know my name and age yet, for instance.

My name's John Hazard and I'm twelve. Should I do for boot-boy, do you think ? ”

“ 'E's a *character*, ” said the Kitchenmaid, with a gasp of surprise, and the deep conviction of one who now saw all clear before her. “ That's what 'e is. ”

“ Should I ? ” said John, desperately, and almost as loudly as Augustus might have done.

“ What do *you* think, Heller ? ” said the Cook, thoughtfully.

“ Oh, *I* think 'e would, ” said the Kitchenmaid. “ Look at the way you could larf at 'im. ”

John gazed at her in not unnatural astonishment, and the Cook said, sighing, “ It's all very well for *you*, Heller, with your light 'eart. What *I'm* lookin' at is the comfort it 'ud be to 'ave some one in the kitchen as could speak perlite when spoke to. ”

“ Ah, pore thing, you would do, ” said the Kitchenmaid.

“ That's what *I'm* lookin' at, Heller, an' there may be those as will feel their mistake in speakin' to a young lady as they do speak to 'er which 'ardly can they be said to speak to 'er at all when they see the manner in which a young lady

should be spoke to though nothin' but a bewt-boy," said the Cook, all in one breath. "You can come to-morrer, my boy. The choosing of the bewt-boys is left to me, an' you can come to-morrer."

John gazed at her, petrified.

"I suppose you go to school still, you bein' the age you are," continued the Cook, "an' you'd better come after school to-morrer for the first time, an' then in between too as usual. You can see the Missus an' tell 'er anything she seems to fancy 'earing, but *she* won't bother you much, nor never would bother no one if Master'd only let 'er be. All she wants to do is to sing by night and day, pore soul, a-tryin' to get up to top notes as it's evident she never can, they bein' little else besides an 'owl. Well, Heller, we'd oughter be gettin' on with the dinner, I suppose."

"Then have I got the place as boot-boy?" said John, faintly.

"Certainly you 'ave, my boy," said the Cook, graciously. "The choosing of the bewt-boys is left to me, an' you can come to-morrer."

Two minutes later John walked agitatedly forth upon Augustus Clickson, and said, "I've got it."

"Got what?" said Augustus, with a start.

"Got the place as boot-boy," said John.

"But you can't have," cried Augustus, aghast.

"It's only the second time."

"I know," said John. "But I have. And I don't *want* to be a boot-boy."

They looked at each other. There was a dreadful silence. Then Augustus Clickson said in an awful voice that grew louder and louder with every word, "Well, this time I *have* had enough. This time I *have*. I gave the silly rot another chance, but this is a bit *too* much. I've had enough of the whole thing. I've had enough——"

"Then why complain?" said a high voice behind them. "Enough is as good as a feast. Why complain?"

John and Augustus looked round with a start. A short, stout gentleman stood in the lane, regarding them with a suspicious countenance. "What are you doing at my back door, complaining at the top of your voices like this?" he demanded.

Augustus was so taken aback he could think of nothing to say but "My gracious!" and John could think of nothing at all. If this short

stout gentleman owned that back door, then he owned the garden and the house and all that was in it, and John was his boot-boy. It was obviously impossible to explain to him why they were complaining.

“What is this?” cried the short gentleman, angrily. “You have a very guilty appearance indeed, both of you. I insist on being answered. Do you hear me? Who are you?”

There was no time to think things out, or to decide what to tell him. “I’m your boot-boy,” stammered John, that being the thing which was uppermost in his mind and quite the worst thing he could have told anybody.

“My *boot-boy*!” cried the short gentleman, in great surprise. “I haven’t got a boot-boy. At least I know I hadn’t when I left the house this morning. What is this? Who has engaged you, pray?”

“The Cook,” said John, and at that the short gentleman nearly bounded out of his skin, which already looked as if it had been stretched further than it had been originally meant to go.

“What!” he shrieked. “The *Cook*! Can I believe my ears! The *Cook*!”

“Well, she *said* she did,” said John, rather

taken aback by the short gentleman's furious reception of his news. "I think she engaged me because of my hair curling." The reason which the Kitchenmaid had given for engaging him crossed John's mind also, but he passed that over in the silence which best befitted it.

"Is it to *this* length that Mariamne carries the lack of discipline in her household!" cried the short gentleman in extraordinary excitement. "Am I to believe my ears! The *Cook* has the choosing of the boot-boys! Impossible! Incredible! *This* is the result of this continued and incessant pouring up and down to the piano on the part of Mariamne! *This* is the consequence of Mariamne's absorption in frivolous pursuits! How often do I say to her, 'Mariamne, I say, Mariamne——' But I will go instantly and say it to her again——" He rushed to the door in the wall, and there pulled himself up abruptly. "And here," he cried, apostrophizing the universe, "is a worthy little boot-boy who has to be cruelly disappointed as the direct result of Mariamne's lack of discipline in her household! Here am I obliged to apologize to a boot-boy! Boot-boy, I apologize! You can't be boot-boy."

He dived into all his pockets, one after another, and after a frantic search produced a shilling.

“If you were to be boot-boy now that the Cook has engaged you, she would think she *had* engaged you, and all discipline in the household would be for ever at an end,” he said. “You can’t be boot-boy. Here’s a shilling. Compensation. And the cruel disappointment of this worthy little boot-boy,” cried the short gentleman, once more apostrophizing the universe, “is the direct result of Mariamne’s lack of discipline in her household.”

He bounded speechlessly through the door, and it slammed behind him, and John and Augustus were left looking at each other in the back lane. So much had happened so fast, and so many people had said so many different things in so short a time, that it was not till they had nearly reached the middle of the back lane that their minds began to clear. Then it became evident, however, that whether from one cause or another, they had certainly not got the place they had asked for, and the Charm was apparently working. A further question developed from the further consideration of the situation. Had they any moral right to that shilling? It had

been given to John to compensate him for his disappointment at not being a boot-boy, and if there were one thing in the world at which he was not disappointed, it was at not being a boot-boy. They decided, therefore, reluctantly, and after some discussion, that it had better be returned ; and after a good deal of thought they arranged that, all explanations being perfectly impossible, they would merely ask the footman at the front door for the master of the house, place the shilling in his hand when he arrived, with many thanks and no explanation at all, and swiftly retire from the scene before he should have time to recover from his surprise sufficiently to ask them any questions. This seemed a feasible plan, and it especially recommended itself to John as eliminating all need of further contact with the Cook or the Kitchenmaid.

So they went back and entered the garden, intending to walk through it round the house to the front, as, being in the middle of the long row of houses, it was some distance round to the front by road. They had safely negotiated the region of the black currant bushes, and were hastening cheerfully along a path at the side of the house, when their plans received a sudden

check that once more threw all into confusion. They heard the sound of someone pouring up and down in vocal scales to the accompaniment of a piano, and at the same moment the person who was pouring apparently heard *them*. The sound ceased, and at the glass door that stood open just where John and Augustus were passing, there suddenly appeared the figure of a lady. John and Augustus paused involuntarily and raised their caps, and the lady looked at them, and said, "Do you want anything?"

"We want the master of the house, please," said John, recovering himself.

"He's just gone out," said the lady. "He rushed in by the back door and almost immediately afterwards he rushed out by the front. But I'm the mistress of the house. Wouldn't I do?"

So this was Mariamne, to whom the stout gentleman had bounded in to say "Mariamne, Mariamne," anent the lack of discipline in her household. It did not appear to have disturbed her much. She had a reflective countenance.

But John and Augustus glanced at each other uncertainly, for where all explanations are

impossible, it is awkward to meet with someone to whom one may have to explain.

"Won't *I* do?" said Mariamne.

"I'm afraid not, thanks," said John, politely.

"We'll come again."

"Why won't *I* do?" said Mariamne, disappointed.

"I'm afraid we couldn't explain it to you," said John.

"Try," said Mariamne, encouragingly. "I'm accustomed to being explained to. As a matter of fact the only things I can't see are the things no one need explain."

John and Augustus looked at each other again, and Augustus put his hands in his pockets and leapt, which was very illuminative of his own state of mind, but did not do much towards illuminating anybody else's. He appeared unable to offer any other suggestion, however, so John made an attempt alone.

"Well, this is a shilling," he said.

"I can see that," said Mariamne, hopefully.

"And that gentleman gave it to me because he thought I was disappointed at not being a boot-boy; but I am not, so we've brought it

back," said John. "And thank him very much, please. That's all."

"Oh, so *you* were the worthy little boot-boy who was so cruelly disappointed at not being able to be boot-boy," said Mariamne, as one enlightened.

"Yes," said John. "But the thing is, I wasn't."

"What weren't you?" said Mariamne.

"Disappointed," said John.

"Not?" said Mariamne, surprised. "How subtle. Why not?"

"Because I didn't want to be a boot-boy," said John.

"Had somebody told you you had to be?" said Mariamne, sympathetically.

"No, thanks," said John.

Mariamne gazed at him in still greater surprise.

"Then why on earth did you try to be?" she said.

Once more did John and Augustus look at each other and once more did Augustus thoughtfully and abstractedly leap. The only truthful answer John could give to that question was: "Because I knew I couldn't be," and that was

the one answer it was obviously impossible to make.

"We can't tell you," he said, firmly. "Here's the shilling. Please explain to the gentleman. Good-bye."

"How can I explain what I don't see myself," said Mariamne. "And he's not the sort of person you *can* explain to, anyhow. He only sees the things no one need explain. However, if you won't tell me——!" She sighed. "Will you come in and have some tea?" she said.

"No thanks," said John and Augustus simultaneously.

"Have you far to go to get home?" said Mariamne.

"Only as far as Down Street, thanks," said John.

Augustus, who had only as far as next door to go to get home, remained discreetly silent.

"Well, good-bye," said Mariamne. "I think it's a pity you cannot be a boot-boy. I think the Cook was very clever to engage you, and I shall tell her so."

"I don't think a curl in the hair is a very good reason to engage a boot-boy," said John.

"I do," said Mariamne. "The best of reasons.

You couldn't engage him for a curl anywhere else, anyway."

They shook hands, and John and Augustus departed, and Mariamne watched them go with a pensive face. Not till they were right out of the neighbourhood of Wickle Hill did they feel that they were really safely out of that stout gentleman's back garden, and even then John had the feeling that he might at any moment come to with a start and find himself a boot-boy.

By that time the cliff shadow was beginning to move forward over the streets, and on Thursday all the best shops in Under closed at seven, which the owners of the shops called Early Closing, though nobody else did. John and Augustus decided that it would be better to postpone further trial of the Charm till next day. So Augustus turned about and rushed up Wickle Hill again and John continued on his road home.

Mother Letitlie took no notice of him as he passed her doorstep. She was asleep in her chair, her hands folded on her lap.

CHAPTER X

THE PROFESSOR TRIES TO COOK

THERE was, on the northern side of the city, where the river and the railway and the highway ran together out of Under, a large new region of shops and little houses springing up around some new factories which had lately been built on that part of the river ; and here, after much consultation, John and Augustus decided to prosecute the third and fourth trials of the Charm the next day.

Their quickest way to this quarter of the city was by the street by the local railways for the first half mile, and then along one side of the market-place, and then by a devious road through a warren of little lanes and byways that stretched thence to the riverside. John and Augustus paused on their journey when they reached the market to turn aside for a moment and look in upon the Hawker in his corner. The market-place was emptying, for the Friday market was a

small and unimportant one and never lasted late, and the cliff shadow was already beginning to move forward over the city. The Hawker, when they found him, was binding his few remaining staves together preparatory to departure; and just as John and Augustus came up, a railway porter came up too, and said to the Hawker in a melancholy voice, "I suppose you don't 'appen to 'ave picked up a letter lyin' about anywheres? I don' know 'ow it is, but I always seem to be losin' things."

"No, I'm afraid I haven't," said the Hawker.

"Nor yet I don't suppose you could tell me where to look for it?" inquired the porter.

"No, I'm afraid I can't," said the Hawker.

"I thought perreps you might," said the porter, sighing. "You bein' the sorter queer chap they say you are, I thought perreps if you 'eld your 'ead an' shut your eyes so as not to be able to see hanythink, you could see things without them bein' there to see, as it were. I am sure I'd be willin' to give anybody a thrip-pence if they could see where that there letter is. I know I 'ad it when I went accrost the market, so it must be somewheres about. But I always seem to be losin' things, an' I've forgotten the

address on it into the bargain, an' that there little girawffe in glasses as give it to me out of the Glasgow mail this mornin,' 'e said it was hurgent an'anded me sixpence to deliver it. It's a dreadful thing for a man as joined the Blew Ribbon at three years of age to 'ave a sixpence 'e can't give back again nor yet earn. But *I* don't know where I dropped it. I always seem to be losin' things." He wandered disconsolately away and they heard him asking everybody as he went, "I suppose you 'aven't seen a letter lyin' anywheres about? *I* don't know where I dropped it."

"Of course he doesn't know where he dropped it, or else he would go and pick it up," said Augustus. "He sounds an idiot."

"He dropped it there," said the Hawker, pointing. In the dust in the shadow of the Hawker's staves, John and Augustus saw a square white patch lying on the ground. "Where's he gone?" said John, hurriedly picking it up; and they pursued the porter in haste. But he seemed to have completely disappeared into the dimness of the market-place with its crowd of departing people, and they had to return, baffled, to the Hawker.

“It’s marked ‘urgent’—I expect it ought to be delivered,” said the Hawker. “Perhaps you could deliver it on your road; and he took up his staves, and went away across the market-place. John and Augustus waited a few moments to see if the porter would come drifting back again explaining to everybody that he always seemed to be losing things; but nobody came. More and more people went away, and John and Augustus were left almost alone in the market-place. The address on the letter was “Professor Pree, Rider’s Lane, Hand Street,” a spot of which neither John nor Augustus had ever heard before, and Augustus did not endeavour to conceal his opinion of people who undertook to deliver urgent letters and then dropped them about so that other people had to postpone equally urgent business in order to deliver them themselves. A person who always seemed to be losing things ought to decide conclusively that he could not deliver anything at all, Augustus held. Nor was his indignation lessened by the extreme difficulty they experienced in finding Rider’s Lane, Hand Street; for which they had to look so long that Augustus stopped to boom in the middle of the street and

declared his intention of looking no longer. John stopped also, for an uncertain moment, during which he wavered between a conviction that it was not worth while to look for the way to Hand Street any more and a memory of the manner in which they had found the way out of another street merely by continuing to look for what certainly did not seem to be there. A vision of Professor Pree, clearly a man of some position, waiting in surprised speculation for the delayed delivery of his urgent letter also rose before him. So he said he thought it would be better to try a few more streets before giving up, and when Augustus refused, he walked on trying by himself, though listening in some anxiety to the fury with which Augustus howled to him to return. Shortly afterwards, however, Augustus suddenly calmed down and hastened after him ; and they proceeded together.

At last, by dint of frequent inquiries, they found Hand Street, and a little later they ran the Professor to ground in a narrow dismal disused little mews which they had twice looked into and twice rejected as being an impossible place for a Professor to be living in. But since he certainly appeared to be living nowhere else,

they decided to see whether he could really be so mistaken as to be living there, and discovered to their surprise that he was, though nobody else seemed to be making the same mistake. On a small brass plate beneath a small and flickering lamp that appeared to wish to go out altogether sooner than remain any longer in Rider's Lane, John and Augustus found the same name that was on the letter they carried—"Professor Pree." So they rang the bell. Instantly a tremendous noise arose inside the house, and someone came rattling down a staircase for which Professor Pree had apparently not yet been able to afford a carpet. The door was flung open and a loud voice cried into Rider's Lane, in welcoming tones of the utmost relief and satisfaction, "*Brown!*"

John and Augustus were so much surprised at the appearance of the person who thus hailed them, that for a moment they could only gaze at him in silence. He was tall and exceedingly thin; and he wore a large top hat, and two pairs of spectacles, and a rubber mask, all pushed up together on his forehead. He also had on an old and very dirty apron, full of holes, and a boot on one foot and a red carpet slipper on the other. He carried an iron spoon, and a

most dreadful smell had issued from the door at the same moment that he did.

"We aren't Brown," said John, recovering himself, while Augustus put his hands in his pockets and thoughtfully leapt in the air.

"*Not?*" cried the thin man in a high voice.

"No," said John.

"Then where's Brown?" cried the thin man. "Most strange!" and he looked anxiously into the dusk beyond the boys as though he hoped to find Brown seated on the ground behind them.

"I'm afraid we don't know where he is," said John. "We've brought a letter for Professor Pree."

"*I* am Professor Pree," said the Professor, hastily taking the letter. "Where's Brown?"

"We don't know," said John.

"*Not?*" cried the Professor in a high voice. He abstractedly opened the letter. "I'm expecting Brown," he said. "Brown is my boy. Brown went to buy some paper this morning. He may be back any moment. I can't think why Brown isn't back now. Most strange. There's nothing to eat when Brown isn't here. He's been here for years and so has the woman and

now she's not here either. Most strange. Why should anyone write me a letter? Most strange. I can't see to read it. Where are my glasses? I haven't got any glasses." He turned to rush upstairs.

"You've got two pairs tangled up on your head," said Augustus, with clearness. It was plain to him that the Professor was insane.

"Indeed," said the Professor. "So I have. Most strange." He disentangled one with difficulty and proceeded to study the letter by the light of the discouraged little lamp. The next instant he gave a loud cry, let fall the hand which carried the letter, and stared wildly at Augustus Clickson.

"Brown's gone to Glasgow," he cried.

Augustus leapt thoughtfully. He could not think of anything else to do and he felt embarrassed under the gaze of incredulous bewilderment with which the Professor regarded him. He knew no reason why Brown should not have gone to Glasgow, and was therefore unable to express the consternation and sympathy which the Professor seemed to expect of him. John said politely, "We're very sorry if you

didn't want him to go to Glasgow, but we're afraid we ought to be——”

“Yes,” said Augustus, “we're afraid we ought to be——”

But they got no further. The Professor took no interest whatever in what they were afraid they ought to be. “Read it,” he cried, and thrust the letter upon Augustus Clickson. John and Augustus read it together under the little lamp.

“DEAR SIR” (ran the letter of Brown who had gone to Glasgow),—“Finding myself seated unexpectedly in a train which appears to be leaving immediately for Glasgow, I feel it would be unbusinesslike of me not to remain seated in it and leave immediately for Glasgow also, to take up the excellent situation offered me in that city three years ago. I have, I believe, from time to time, whenever, in short, it occurred to me to do so, informed you of this offer and of my imminent departure, but it had recently slipped my memory till reminded of it by the apparently trustworthy information of a railway porter who, though with an appearance of some gloom (which I think, however, is not produced by any conviction of an impending catastrophe, but merely by a naturally melancholy temperament),

says that I would seem to have seated myself by mistake in a train which is leaving for Glasgow, instead of the one on the local railway by which I believed myself to be returning to you from the ordering of the foolscap paper which I trust the shopkeeper will duly deliver to you. I feel sure you will think with me that it would be highly unbusinesslike in me to lose an opportunity of leaving for Glasgow which may never occur again.

“I am, dear Sir,

“Yours truly,

“P. BROWN.”

“Can you believe it!” cried the Professor, “Brown has gone to Glasgow! Most strange! Brown has suddenly and irretrievably gone by train to Glasgow.”

“If he’s been trying to go there for three years I don’t call it so sudden,” said Augustus.

“*Not?*” cried the Professor, in a high voice, pushing up his glasses. “But what am I to do now? What shall I do without Brown?” He gazed in the utmost despair at John and Augustus. “What on *earth* shall I do now?” he cried. He appeared so

certain that they fully understood and shared his consternation over the businesslike departure of Brown for Glasgow, that they glanced at each other in some discomfort, for they did not understand it in the least.

"We don't know what you can do," remarked Augustus, leaping. "I shouldn't think you can do anything at all."

"Not?" cried the Professor. "But I am so hungry."

John and Augustus gazed at him in astonishment.

"Hungry," they repeated.

"I have had nothing to eat all day," said the Professor despairingly. "Nothing. Brown bought food whenever it occurred to him and there was a woman who cooked it for him, and they brought it in every now and again, almost invariably when I did not want it. But to-day nobody has brought in anything. There's been nobody to bring it and nothing to bring."

"Is the woman gone too, then?" said John.

"She never even came," said the Professor. "She may be ill or she may also be travelling suddenly by train to Glasgow—how can I tell? She has not come to-day, and I have no idea

where to look for her. I have been trying to cook something myself, but I fear it has inadvertently got mixed up with the remains of an experiment and I don't quite recognize the smell."

If he meant the smell that had come out of the door with him, John and Augustus could only feel that they did not recognize it either.

"Pray come up and see it," cried the Professor impulsively. "Pray do. You may perhaps be able to recognize what is wrong with it by its appearance. It was rapidly changing its appearance when I left it in the saucepan. I beg you will come up and see it."

Thoughts of the swiftly passing time and of the postponed trial of the Charm were weighing heavily upon the minds of John and Augustus. They looked at each other uncertainly. But the Professor seemed so certain that they could not desert him in the terrible dilemma into which he had been plunged by the businesslike departure of Brown for Glasgow after giving notice for three years, that they felt it would be cruel to do so. After a moment's hesitation they followed him through a whitewashed lobby, and up a short flight of wooden stairs.

"On coming up and down these," said the

Professor, mounting nimbly, "I always wear a great coat, as you perceive. This place was once a stable and it is excessively draughty. In a great coat one is perfectly safe, however. My great coat is one of the few things I never omit to put on."

This was more than Augustus could bear in silence, however. "You haven't got on any great coat," he remarked.

"*Not?*" cried the Professor in a high voice. "Most strange. What *have* I got on then? I know I've got on something." Without waiting for an answer he pushed open a door at the head of the stairs and led the way into a huge laboratory, which looked as though it had been made of four barns thrown into one. It was filled with every possible kind of scientific appliance and apparatus and instrument and flooded with brilliant electric light. Long tables ran down the sides and the middle and at the bottom great furnaces were built into the walls.

"Here's the kitchen," said the Professor, hurrying to another door. "Come in, come in."

John and Augustus entered. Never had they seen such chaos. The Professor's efforts to cook had completely wrecked the place. An enormous

fire was roaring in the range, and on it was a small saucepan emitting a most dreadful smell. The Professor rushed towards it. "Perhaps you will know if it is all right by its appearance," he murmured anxiously. He took the cover off the saucepan, looked in, and uttered a loud cry. "It *has* no appearance!" he cried. "It is gone!"

John and Augustus hastened to look. To the red hot bottom of the saucepan a small black cinder was adhering with a resolution that no shake could weaken. "What was it?" asked Augustus surprised.

"It was a large red piece of meat personally recommended to me by a meat shop," said the Professor, sinking in despair upon a chair. "Why has it vanished thus?"

"I don't think you ought to cook things in a perfectly dry saucepan," said John doubtfully.

"*Not?*" said the Professor. "But it wasn't perfectly dry. I am almost certain it had the remains of an experiment in it and I think that must be the reason of the unusual smell." He sat gazing helplessly at the boys. "What shall I do now?" he said. "I *am* so hungry."

Augustus leapt. "The poor chap's mad," he remarked in a low voice, but with decision.

John observed uncertainly that if you could not cook your own food it was often a good plan to buy some that had been cooked by other people. The Professor almost wept with relief at this suggestion. It had never occurred to him before that such a thing was possible. He began an eager search for money, of which he said he remembered having seen quantities about, and finally discovered two half-crowns in the soap dish in his bedroom, which he immediately presented to Augustus Clickson.

“What are you giving them to *me* for?” said Augustus, surprised.

“To buy the ready-made food with,” said the Professor, and he sat down to wait for it on a chair in the middle of the laboratory, beaming with satisfaction and hope.

“We’d better see him through now,” said Augustus with mingled disgust and resignation. “He’s got no brains, poor chap.”

So they went out and bought some ready-made food at a neighbouring cook-shop, and on their return the Professor helped them with enthusiasm to sweep science out of the way for nature, and cleared a table with such force that he sent flying to the ground several arrangements of a most

complicated appearance that looked as if they had just been about to explain everything that there was to explain. His belief that the ready-made food had been bought for the three of them, and that it was only just in the nick of time to save all of them from death by starvation, was so evident that Augustus and John fell in with it without further protest. They were in truth not sorry to do so, for the hour of their own last meal was some way behind them, and it was already too late to hope to do anything much with the Charm that evening. So they ate bread, beef, pickles, ham, and jam and cake in the midst of the laboratory with the smiling Professor in the large top hat, as if that had been the immediate and only aim with which they had rung the bell in Rider's Lane an hour before,

When he had finished, the Professor sat and continued to smile upon his companions for quite five minutes. Then gradually his expression changed. His smile became set and abstracted. After a moment he arose, looked round him vaguely, and picked up and adjusted a pair of spectacles. Then he went to a table which stood by itself and was covered with books and papers. He sat down to it, stared before him a few seconds,

and began to write. Everything had passed from his mind. Astonished and distracted, he had been brought forcibly down to the earth and forcibly detained there by the businesslike departure of Brown for Glasgow and the dearth of food which had resulted therefrom. Now he had had food and it had become completely immaterial to him where Brown was. The Professor left the earth forthwith in the same businesslike manner in which Brown had left for Glasgow, and was clearly not prepared to return to it that night unless he had to.

John and Augustus, who were much interested by the strange things they saw around them, took the opportunity of making a little tour of investigation before leaving, and they were deep in some highly complicated structure of steel and glass and bellows in a distant corner, of which they were vainly endeavouring to guess the use, when a startling roar recalled them to other matters.

The Professor, still seated at his table with his eyes shut and his pen in his hand, had pushed his glasses up on his forehead and was shouting encouragingly aloud into space as though Brown were a sort of hen, "Brown, Brown. Come, Brown, come, Brown. Brown, Brown. Come, Brown, come."

"Brown isn't here, sir," said John advancing, while Augustus, interested by this further proof of the Professor's entire absence of brains, put his hands in his pockets and gazed upon him, leaping. The Professor opened his eyes, stared at John, and appeared to return slowly from a great way off.

"*Not ?*" he inquired in a high voice.

"No, sir," said John.

"Where's Brown ?" said the Professor.

"He's in Glasgow," said John.

"*Glasgow ?*" said the Professor surprised.

"Why Glasgow ? Most strange." His eyes fell on his papers. Oblivion slowly returned to them.

"Where are my glasses ? I haven't any glasses," he said, feeling into space vaguely for another pair.

"You've got three pairs tangled up on your head," said Augustus with clearness.

"Indeed," murmured the Professor. "Most strange." He pulled a pair down over his eyes with some difficulty. Then he said pathetically, "I want Brown. I want *someone*," and returned to his work.

John and Augustus stood in the midst of the great laboratory and looked at each other. The

same thought had flashed into the minds of both. They retired into a distant corner to consult.

The chief objections to their sudden idea were four in number. First, the Professor appeared so deserted that it hardly seemed fair to allow him to think he had found someone to take Brown's place when, owing to its being only the third trial of the Charm, the chances were that he might *not* have found someone. Secondly, John thought he would rather like to take service with the amiably impulsive if brainless Professor, and doubted whether he would not do better to keep this opportunity for the fourth trial of the Charm, when he would be bound to get what he asked for. Thirdly, the Professor, while they were making the third trial of the Charm elsewhere, might be impulsively procuring another boy elsewhere; and fourthly, they did not like to try for the place *without* the Charm, lest for any reason they did not get it, when the magic sequence would have been broken in vain. The situation was so full of complications that John and Augustus became greatly muddled while endeavouring to consider it, and they finally decided to give up considering it altogether and merely to try for the place with the Charm, always remembering

that they were not bound to accept its guidance if it did not lead them whither they wished to go when once they were sure where they did wish to go.

So John fetched it from the corner where he had placed it for safety, and they returned to the middle of the laboratory, and Augustus touched the Professor's arm, while John stood well in front of him.

"Eh, what, which?" said the Professor, lifting his head and looking at them without seeing them at all.

"Would I do as boy, do you think, sir?" said John, and he clasped the Charm in his left hand and swept the air with his right from his forehead to the ground. The Professor once more slowly returned from a great way off and gazed at John with interest and surprise. Then apparently coming to the conclusion that he had been made the recipient of some politeness which, though slightly incomprehensible, it behoved him to return, he bowed to John so deeply that the three pairs of spectacles and the top hat and the rubber mask all fell off together among the papers on the table.

"How did that get there?" said the Professor

when he was erect again, gazing with surprise at the top hat. "Most strange."

This tickled Augustus, but with an effort he restrained his mirth, and he and John looked expectantly at the Professor and the Professor looked expectantly at them. Perceiving this Augustus pityingly took command of the situation.

"Will he do, do you think?" he said.

"Will who do what?" said the Professor amiably.

"Will John Hazard do to come here as boy instead of Brown?" said Augustus.

"Where's Brown?" said the Professor, surprised.

"He's gone to *Glasgow*," said Augustus loudly. He felt strongly inclined to boom, but compassion restrained his exasperation.

"Oh, so he has," said the Professor. "Yes, Brown has suddenly and irretrievably gone by train to Glasgow. Most strange. And will this one do instead of Brown? Is that it. Certainly. Certainly. An excellent idea! I must have *someone* now Brown has gone by train to Glasgow. Certainly, Certainly." He beamed with pleasure at the clear understanding at which he felt certain he had now arrived.

John and Augustus looked at each other, and

Augustus leapt. They did not quite know how they felt. They had got the situation, and the Charm was not working. The Professor glanced at his papers, and instantly recommenced sinking into oblivion, but Augustus, perceiving the process, arrested it in time.

"Wouldn't you like to ask him some questions?" he said.

"What about?" said the Professor, returning to himself with surprise.

"About what he can do and things like that," said Augustus.

"Certainly, certainly, what can he do?" said the Professor.

"He can run messages and clean up and help cook and do errands and dust and carry things, can't you. Hazard?" said Augustus. "What else can you do, Hazard?"

"That's about all, I think," said John modestly, "except for cleaning boots and knives."

"Very nice, very nice, indeed," said the Professor, "I don't think I remember Brown doing all that. Very kind, indeed."

"And you'd better have his address in case you want to write to his mother at any time," said Augustus, and he took a pen and a piece of

paper and wrote it down in a businesslike manner.

“Certainly, certainly, let us frequently write to his mother,” said the Professor. “And meanwhile he can continue to correct the proofs of the second part of my treatise on the Differential Analysis of Solar Radiation where Brown left off. Perhaps he wouldn’t mind bringing me those last sheets from Brown’s table over there. I think Brown had looked through the mathematics of those sheets.”

To say that John and Augustus received a shock from this speech is to put it lightly. They stood staring at each other in dismay, and the Professor instantly took advantage of the pause in the proceedings to recommence sinking into oblivion. But before he had gone very deep in, John said in an uncertain voice, “Did Brown do mathematics, sir?”

“You really could hardly say so,” said the Professor suddenly returning to full consciousness at so saddening a recollection. “For a mathematical assistant they were most elementary, *most* elementary, alas! Still, he was of some use to me, and I must have someone to spare me initial and unnecessary labour.”

"But you *can't* have had a mathematical assistant only as old as Hazard," cried Augustus Clickson loudly.

"*Not?*" said the Professor surprised. "Why not? Where's Hazard? Who's Hazard? How old is Hazard?"

John, in a melancholy voice, went to the root of the matter.

"The question really is," he said, "how old was Brown?"

"Yes, Brown, Brown, Brown, how old was Brown, the question really is, how old was Brown?" said the Professor rapidly.

"How old did he *look*?" said John.

"Oh, how old did he *look*?" said the Professor, pondering. "Yes, the question now really is, how old did he *look*?"

"You called him a boy, you see," said John.

"Oh, I called him a boy," said the Professor. "Yes, I called him a boy, you know, because he *was* a boy. They once spilt him out of something somewhere, I believe, and he never grew again. He can't really have grown much even before they spilt him out of something somewhere, for he scarcely come to my waist, poor boy. A boy, a mere boy."

John and Augustus looked at each other gloomily. The truth was out. They had not got the third situation they had tried for, and the Charm was working.

"I'm afraid I won't do for your situation, sir," said John in depressed resignation, "I know hardly any mathematics."

"Not?" cried the Professor, putting on a pair of spectacles and gazing at John in anxious surprise.

"No, sir," said John.

"Dear me," said the Professor, "no mathematics. Most strange. Dear me, dear me."

He continued to gaze at John with the greatest surprise and commiseration, and John and Augustus gazed back at him. Then, as there seemed nothing else to say, John and Augustus said good-bye.

"Oh, good-bye, good-bye, good-bye," said the Professor. He sat and watched them go, still murmuring to himself in reflective perturbation, "No mathematics, dear me! Most strange," and when they had reached the bottom of the stairs, they heard him running rapidly above, and his head, once more in the large top hat, appeared over the balustrade.

"No mathematics?" cried the Professor impulsively.

“No, sir,” said John.

“*Not?*” said the Professor in a high voice. “Dear me, dear me. And you have both been so kind, and your manners are so polite, and your knowledge of cooking so profound. Dear me.” John and Augustus walked down the mews in some gloom. When they reached the end, John remarked: “Well, we’ve got the *third* trial done, anyway.”

This fact had temporarily escaped Augustus Clickson. He revived at the thought, put his hands in his pockets, and leapt. “So we have,” he said.

“And there’s the fourth time still to try,” said John.

“So there is,” said Augustus, “And that poor chap had no brains anyhow.”

It was much too late to try the Charm for the fourth time that night, however. The cliff shadow had long fallen over the streets of Under, and the shops were all shut. So John and Augustus arranged to meet at half past one the next day, it being a Saturday; and Augustus then sought the road to Wickle Hill, and John returned to Down Street—so late that Mother Letitlie’s doorway was empty when he went by.

CHAPTER XI

THE LITTLE MAN ARRIVES

WHEN John passed Mother Letitlie's doorstep on his way back from school next day, however, he found her on it, and looking forth from it, in a state of great irritation.

"What Down Street's coming to, I don't know," she said. "As if the world wasn't black enough already. There'll soon be no place left where a person can set quiet and bear with their misfortunes and leave things be as best they can. It's a nice thing when a person gets waked up by being shot off their chairs in the middle of their first snooze by a madman stroodling in and out."

"Has there been a madman stroodling in and out?" said John, surprised.

"Should I say there had been if there hadn't?" said old Mother Letitlie. "Falling over a person on their own doorstep and asking if it was No 179, when he could see for himself it wasn't."

Why can't people set in their homes and bear with their misfortunes as best they may and leave other people to set in their homes and bear with theirs."

John went on to his own home, and found his mother also on her doorstep, looking out for him in some anxiety.

"Such a strange thing has happened, John darling," she said. "I fear poor James has gone away with a madman."

"Gone away with him," said John, surprised.

"Well, I'm afraid so," said his mother. "I don't know what else to think. This morning as I was standing here waiting for the girl to come back from the baker's, I saw a crowd of little boys coming up the street. Of course it was very impolite of the little boys to crowd him, but really you could hardly wonder at it, for he had four pairs of spectacles on his forehead, and he wore a top hat, and an old apron, and a boot on one foot and a red carpet slipper on the other."

"Who did?" said John with a shock of apprehension.

"The madman James has gone away with," said his mother. "He was carrying a piece of

paper, and he stopped at every door and peered; first at his piece of paper and then at the door; and when he got to this door he peered at his piece of paper and said: 'No. 179. Kindly inform him, madam, that I should wish him to come as cook.' "

John could only gaze at his mother in silence. The possibility of such a complication had never entered his most precautionary imaginings.

"Wasn't it extraordinary, my dear John!" said his mother. "I said to him, 'I am afraid I don't quite understand what you say,' and *he* said to me, 'I will enter and explain to him that I wish him to come as cook. The woman has never returned and a knowledge of mathematics is not essential in a cook,' which, of course, made me understand him less than ever."

"And *did* he enter?" said John, apprehensively.

"Yes, he did," said his mother. "He took off his top hat and walked straight in, and I was so much bewildered I did not know whether to stop him or not. He walked into the dining-room, and when he saw James working at the table, he said, 'This is not the right little boy. Where is the right little boy? I desire to inform the

right little boy that I wish him to come as cook. His manners are so polite and his knowledge of cooking so profound that I wish him to come as cook.' What in the world can he have meant, my dear John ? " said his mother, gazing at him in bewilderment. " He can't *really* have wanted a little boy to go to him as cook ! And *what* little boy ? "

John was so nervous lest he should make a truthful remark and convey an impression to his mother that he knew what she was talking about, and so nervous lest he should make an untruthful remark and convey to his mother the impression that he did not, that he made no remark at all. He stood on one leg and gazed at her.

" And you *know* what poor James is ! " continued his mother with a sigh. " He left off working, and looked at the madman for a long time without seeing that he was there, and then he said, ' Can't this person go elsewhere, mother ? I'm working.' And the madman began to look dreamily at James' books and papers as though he were gradually going madder and madder, and said, ' Working ? Dear me ! Most strange. What are you working at ? ' and took up some

of James' papers. And the next moment he cried at the top of his voice, 'Dear me! Most strange! This is my treatise on the something or other of a solar something or other,' and after that they went away together."

"At once?" said John, surprised at this sudden transition between the Professor's discovery of his treatise and his instant departure with James.

"Well, *practically* at once," said his mother. "The madman waved his arms in the air and talked at the top of his voice for about ten minutes and then James gathered up his papers and got his cap without saying a word—you *know* poor James!—and they and all the little boys went away together practically at once, I haven't the least idea where. I did ask the madman several questions, such as who was he, and would he sit down, but he never told me who he was and he never did sit down. And I can't help being a little anxious about poor James, John darling, because the extraordinary thing is that he took a loaf."

"Who did?" said John.

"The madman James has gone away with," said his mother. "By the time they got out

into the passage, the girl had come back, and the loaf for dinner was on the table there, and he took it the minute he saw it without asking anyone if he might, and began breaking bits off and eating them while he talked. And he went away still talking and eating the loaf, so there's no bread for dinner and where in the world can they have gone to ? ”

John endeavoured cautiously to re-assure his mother without giving himself away.

“ I don't think he'll hurt James,” he said. “ I believe he's only a Professor.”

“ A *Professor*,” said his mother. “ Where have you heard of him ? And why in the world should a Professor come here for a cook, and take away a loaf ? ”

At that moment a loud shriek burst from the interior of the house, followed by a crashing noise.

“ Oh, my goodness gracious, the girl ! ” ejaculated his mother, and she fled inside.

John seized both the opportunity of escaping and some dinner to eat on his road ; and when he met Augustus later on, he told him in some perturbation what had occurred.

“ It's only a mercy the Professor didn't give the whole thing away,” he said.

“Well, he didn’t, so it doesn’t matter,” said Augustus Clickson. “Come on, we’re wasting time.”

So they went on towards the North Quarter for the fourth trial of the Charm; and as they turned into the little street by the railways, they saw a tall woman with a hooked nose stealing up it. She was creeping along under the walls of the warehouses as though she fancied it was safer there than in the roadway. The moment she saw John and Augustus, she rushed up to them, seized John by the arm and said in a whisper, “Do you know the Hawker—the Hawker who sells staves and Charms?”

“Yes,” said John.

“Then tell him,” whispered the woman, “that there will be two on the waste lands under the cliff at dusk to-night who must escape out of Under at once for ever. Alas, alas, the venturesome little Papa!” And she was gone, stealing away under the warehouse walls.

John and Augustus, when they had recovered from their surprise, decided that it would be better to turn aside into the market as they went past it and deliver the message, in case the safety of somebody from something really

did depend on it, though the waste lands did not seem a very good place for anybody to choose to escape from. For those who could not climb the waterfall there appeared to be no way off them at all, except back again through Under.

But just before they turned the corner of the street that led down to the market-place, they heard the Hawker's cry, "Staves to sell, staves to sell;" and round the corner came the Hawker himself. When he saw John and Augustus he stopped.

"We were just coming to find you for a minute on our way to the North Quarter, Hawker," said John. "We met a woman a few moments ago, the same woman whom I once saw looking for you in Down Street, and she told us to tell you that there will be two people under the cliff on the waste lands at dusk to-night who must escape out of Under at once for ever."

The Hawker let his load of staves down into the doorway that belonged to the house which ended the line of warehouses, and stretched his arms.

"More than two people will do that to-night," said he.

At that instant there came the sound of running

feet, and a slim little man carrying a brown bag flew round the corner and hurled himself into the Hawker.

“They’re after me again,” he gasped. “If I let them get me, they’ll find out who I am, and my secret will be lost. Save me, save me!”

“Get behind me,” said the Hawker, and the slim little man dived into the doorway behind the staves and the Hawker. He had scarcely disappeared before there came again the sound of running feet, and a policeman rushed round the corner. He came to a dead stop and looked this way and that. The little street lay empty of any figure save those of John and Augustus and the Hawker.

“Must have gone down the other turning,” said the policeman, and he wheeled about, and rushed round the corner again.

“Thank you very much, indeed,” said the little man, emerging from behind the staves and wiping his face. “This is just the dreadful kind of thing that keeps happening to me, and sometimes I believe I’m in a nightmare. How shall I ever get safely back to my boat! There’s a mile of lonely little streets between this and the

North Quarter, and if this kind of thing happens there I shall be done for. If only I were of a rather larger size ! ”

“ Two or three of your size would be all right,” said the Hawker.

“ You are quite right, my good fellow,” said the little man, smiling mildly. “ That’s an excellent notion. You yourself are as tall and as strong as three of me. I will give you a sovereign if you’ll come with me to the North Quarter.”

“ I’m afraid I can’t,” said the Hawker, pulling his staves up on to his shoulders. “ I have my trade to look after. But these two are going to the North Quarter. Perhaps *they* will go with you,” and he went away down the street calling, “ Staves to sell, staves to sell.”

“ You can come with us if you like,” said Augustus.

“ Thank you very much, indeed,” said the little man, doubtfully ; “ but are you not rather young ? ”

“ I may be young, but I’m as tall as you and a jolly sight stronger, and so I tell you,” said Augustus with indignation. “ However, if you don’t want to come with us, don’t. *We* don’t care.”

"I didn't mean that," said the little man hastily. "I only meant that the most extraordinary things seem to keep happening to me, and I don't know whether I ought to let you run the risk of them happening to you too."

"Let 'em happen," said Augustus. "Hazard and I can take care of ourselves."

"I shall be very grateful, indeed, if I may come with you," said the little man.

"Come on, then," said Augustus.

So John and Augustus and the slim little man started for the North Quarter together. They avoided the street down which the policeman had rushed, and gave the market a wide berth instead of passing along it, and so got into the warren of little lanes and byways that lay between the market and the river. They travelled safely through several of these, and the little man became reassured and mildly cheerful.

"I expect they hardly like to attack three together, whoever they may be," he said. "It was an excellent notion, your coming with me. They——"

At that moment two men carrying ropes suddenly and silently fell out of a doorway in a narrow lane through which they happened

at the moment to be passing, and bore him to earth.

The little man uttered a short, sharp yell as he fell. "I told you so," he cried. "Save me, save me——" but more was not audible, for he had disappeared under the two men. There, being unarmed and much the smallest of the three, he might have remained indefinitely, if not for ever, had not Augustus, on recovering from the petrification into which the suddenness of the occurrence had momentarily plunged him, fallen upon the group from above with a roar that echoed in the heavens.

A fight always roused Augustus to the utmost pitch of indignation, and the fury with which he invariably hurled himself into it, whether it was his fight or anybody else's, generally came as a great surprise to those who encountered him. As a result of his onslaught, the unhindered trussing up with ropes of the slim little man suddenly turned into a four-handed *mêlée* under far more sporting conditions; around which John, having recovered his scattered wits, ran in great anxiety, hitting at anything that came uppermost that he was certain he had never seen before. Several dogs arrived from

nowhere and ran round with him, barking loudly, and the door of No. 8, which happened to be the one nearest the scene of action, slowly opened after a few moments to allow of the appearance of a stout man, who, remarking with a pleased air to nobody in particular that he *thought* he'd heard a little somethink somewhere, leant against the doorpost, smoking, and benevolently contemplating the struggling heap on the ground. Otherwise no one in Poop Lane took any notice of the noise that was going on in their neighbourhood. There was no one passing up and down. All the people who were at work were at work, and all the people who were not at work were, as was their wont on Saturday afternoons, asleep.

It was John who brought the fight to a sudden and unexpected conclusion. He saw momentarily close together in the revolving whirl of arms and legs and heads on the ground two noses that were entirely strange to him, and he let drive at them both, one after the other, with all his strength. Perhaps the unexpected descent of the infuriated Augustus, or the courageous defence which the little man put up for himself as soon as he found himself partially restored to

light and air, had already surprised and shaken the nerve of an enemy more versed in destruction than warfare. Anyway, that ended it. With a yell the owners of the noses disentangled themselves, scrambled to their feet, and before anyone could realize what was happening they had fled with streaming faces down the street and were gone, taking their ropes with them. Whereupon Augustus and the little man also scrambled to their feet, in a state of dust and dishevelment in which their own mothers, even if they had known them, would have preferred not to.

“Well, that’s over,” said the stout man in the doorway, with a satisfied smile, and he turned to re-enter his dwelling.

“I will give you a shilling if you will let us come in and have a wash and brush-up,” said the little man, panting.

The stout man, after remaining for a moment motionless in a thoughtful effort to realize that he was being addressed and that something was required of him, said he supposed there wasn’t no reel ’arm in it, and led them in.

“My name is Mr. George Chart, and these are my two nephews, and that was a slight political difference we were settling just now

in your street," said the little man, as he paid the stout man his shilling. The information did not interest the stout man nearly so much as the shilling. It was the same to him who anybody was.

"I had to say that so as to throw him off the scent," said the little man, with a sigh, as they walked away. "I have to make a point of throwing people off the scent everywhere, but the worst of it is they never seem to be thrown. Who they *think* I am I don't know, but if they caught me they'd soon find out who I *really* am, and my secret would be betrayed. Sometimes," added the little man, with a sigh, "with all these dreadful things that keep happening to me, I almost think I'm in a nightmare."

John and Augustus, however, had never before found themselves in the company of a person who apparently could not go for an ordinary walk without being chased by police and fallen upon by assassins; and they were naturally surprised.

"Why do they keep happening to you?" said Augustus, leaping.

"I have no idea," said the little man.

"But you *must* have!" said Augustus loudly.

"I haven't, I do assure you," said the little man, despairingly.

"Then tell the police about it and have them *stopped* happening," said Augustus with decision.

"No, no, I can't do that," said the little man hastily. "I can't tell the police anything. My secret would instantly be out. I couldn't tell the police a single thing without their instantly discovering everything I don't want anyone to know. No, if these dreadful things are to continue happening to me, they must simply continue happening."

Nothing more did happen to anybody, however, during the short journey that still remained to the river. They found the little wharf at which the little man had left his boat. She was little too—a yellow dinghy, as broad as she was long, and more like a button than a boat. The little man pulled her up to the steps and shook hands warmly with John and Augustus and thanked them very much for having saved him from the assassins.

He then endeavoured to step into the dinghy, but owing to the fact that he stepped on to her side instead of into her middle, she shot away with a violent tilt, and the little man shot away

also, face downwards among the oars and seats. Recovering himself, he sought to row back to the wall, but as he sat with his face to the direction to which he wished to row, the dinghy remained where she was, though the strain of the current and the tide, which was now setting strongly seawards, made her rope creak loudly.

“Why does she not move?” said the little man, pausing in surprise.

“Move where?” said Augustus from the river wall, whence he and John had surveyed the little man’s manœuvres with astonishment.

“Back to the wall, of course,” said the little man, recommencing to row harder than ever.

“She doesn’t move back to the wall because you’re rowing her away from it,” said Augustus, and he seized the rope, loosed it from the wall, and hauled the dinghy in with such vigour that the little man went over the seat and arrived at the quay on his back.

“Boats are such curious things,” he said, picking himself up with a sigh. “William, the son of my landlord in the Inn, rowed me up. I have to be a great deal on the river, of course—some of the oldest parts of the city are built on the river—and William rows and sails me

about a great deal. But he said he had business in the town and could not row me back, so I shall have to hire a waterman."

He shouted for a waterman, but no one answered, and John and Augustus, looking round, observed that the little quay was absolutely deserted. No old salts lounged upon it, no children played on its edge; not so much as a head looked out of the closed doors of the dilapidated little houses by which it was surrounded.

"Where has everybody gone to?" shouted the little man, puzzled. "The place was full of people this morning." He shouted again. John and Augustus shouted too, but not the faintest sign of life emerged from anywhere in response to their cries. The little man looked up at them anxiously. "What shall I do now?" he said. "I suppose *you* couldn't row me back? I should be so much obliged if you could."

John and Augustus looked down at him. Augustus still held the painter of the dinghy, and she rubbed her round nose gently against the river-wall as though she were thinking of the running tide beneath her, and of the easy journey a dinghy might have bobbing out to sea.

"I *can* row a bit," said Augustus. "My father takes me out with him rowing and sailing whenever he gets a day off. But I don't see how we can come with you. We've wasted an awful lot of time already, and we've got a lot to do."

"Yes, I'm afraid we——" said John.

"*Jump!*" cried the little man, giving a jump himself as his eyes suddenly travelled past them; and such was the urgency of his shout that John and Augustus did jump, first with the start it gave them and then, without so much as a glance behind them, straight into the boat.

"Off, go, get," cried the little man incoherently, plunging madly about. "Away, or all is lost. They'll find out who I am in an instant if once they get me. Away, away!"

Augustus shoved the dinghy out with a vigorous push, and, the current catching her, she swung out into the river.

"I told you so," cried the little man, "I——" but the swing of the dinghy caught him in the middle of his remark, and the rest of it was lost under a seat.

Augustus ran the oars out, and steadied the rocking little boat in the current, and he and John looked back. Another policeman stood

on the edge of the quay. He seemed to have arrived there faster than it was his habit to arrive at places, and he was consequently too breathless to do anything but reckon. But the sight of him appeared to rouse the little man to a perfect frenzy of indignation and agitation.

“Go away, go away,” he cried, scrambling up excitedly. “I know what you’ll do if you get me. You’ll tell me I’m Harry Field just as the other policeman did, and that I’m wanted for complicity in a jewel robbery, and then you’ll try to march me off to the police courts just as he tried to do, and find out instantly who I am. I’m not coming near you, whatever you say. Go away, go away.”

The policeman on the quay turned purple with surprise at this anticipation of his purpose, and with rage at its being defied.

“You come in this instant,” he roared. “I know ’oo you are well enough. You’re ’Arry Field, and nobody else. I’ve got your description ’ere in my pocket, and I see you up near the market, and lost you in the streets coming down. There’s not *two* of you knockin’ about, you hunder-sized, hover-dressed, sandy-’aired

little whipper-snapper you. You come in this instant, or you'll be sorry."

"I'm *not* coming in," cried the little man. "I never stole a sixpence in my life. and I'm not Harry Field, I tell you. Someone is laying false information against me. You may dance on the edge of that wall till you're blue. I'm not coming in."

The policeman, as there dawned upon him more fully the difficulty of persuading a man, six feet of deep water away, to behave as Harry Field when he says that he is someone else, became perfectly inarticulate with rage.

"Row away, row away," cried the little man to Augustus.

Augustus, in blank amazement, began to row away, but when the policeman saw the boat moving he found his voice again in a roar of fury.

"If you don't come in this instant," he shouted, "I'll raise the whole river-side against you. I'll make you sorry you didn't come in quiet when you 'ad the chance. I swear I will."

He turned about and roared for a waterman, evidently with a view of getting a boat and

pursuing the little man by water. Not a window opened, not a voice answered. The little quay remained as silent as the grave. But his shouts seemed to fill the little man with anxiety.

"Row back, row back," he said to Augustus despairingly. "He must be stopped. He'll attract the attention of every one in Under."

Augustus put the dinghy back into the slack water, nearer the wall, but still out of reach, and the little man stood up, and addressed the policeman.

"Look here, constable," he said, "if I can bring a witness to prove to you that I am not Harry Field, will you let me go?"

"You *are* 'Arry Field," cried the policeman.

"I'm *not*, I tell you," cried the little man, despairingly.

"If you're so sure you can prove you aren't 'Arry Field, you come in quiet and prove it in the courts," said the policeman.

"I can't prove it in the courts without proving other things that I don't want to prove and that I'm not going to prove and that I won't prove," said the little man excitedly. "What in the

world is the meaning of all this ? Who can it be that has set the police after me ? ”

“ The man as set the police ont'er you is the man you 'elped steal the jewels,” said the policeman. “ We got proof enough together at last to arrest 'im on it, and we took 'im yesterday, an' 'e told us about you all right. I dessay 'e'd like to see you took too. An' took you'll be, my man, sooner or later. You come in this instant an' go with me quiet.”

“ I don't know anything about any jewels,” cried the little man, wildly. “ I don't know what you're talking about. I never stole sixpence in my life. This is just the dreadful kind of thing that keeps happening to me, and sometimes I think I'm in a nightmare. But I'm not coming in. You go up that lane and take the first to the right and the first to the left and then ask for Poop Lane, and in No. 8 Poop Lane you will find a man who will come with you for a small honorarium, say twopence, and tell you if I'm Harry Field or not.”

“ Yes, an' while I'm gone you'll go too,” cried the policeman.

“ I am going anyhow,” cried the little man with dignity, “ and if you refuse to take a good offer

while it's open to you, I will go at once, and you can do your worst."

The policeman turned about again, and again roared for a waterman, but again he roared in vain; and at last he apparently came with fury to the conclusion that he had better take the little man's offer since, good or not, it was the only one there was. He suddenly ceased roaring, and, without deigning to glance again at the boat, strode away across the quay and up the lane.

"I fear you will *have* to come down the river with me now," said the little man, sinking back exhausted into the boat. "You cannot desert me now, you really cannot. If I went ashore now to try and get somebody else, he'd arrest me for being Harry Field if fifty people swore I wasn't, and I should find myself in the police-court and obliged to reveal all."

John and Augustus, lost in amazement, had hitherto sat, borne, as it were, on the stream of events, stupefied and astounded; but at this juncture Augustus partially recovered.

"Look here," he said, "it's all very well to say you don't want to reveal anything, and of course Hazard and I don't want to be impolite, but the question is, are you a murderer or

aren't you ? That's the real question, and so I tell you. Isn't it, Hazard ? ”

“ Well, perhaps not a *murderer* exactly,” said John, soothingly, at the sight of the little man's astounded face and fallen jaw. “ But perhaps a thief or something of that sort.”

“ Of course, Hazard and I don't mind what you are,” said Augustus, magnanimously. “ Every one knows that anyone can fall under sudden temptation and all that, and Hazard and I might be murderers ourselves some day if we found we couldn't help it. But what we feel is that if you *are* a murderer or anything of that kind, we'd rather get out of the boat.”

“ We feel our mothers would rather we did,” explained John encouragingly.

“ I don't know that I mind so much about my mother,” said Augustus. “ I'd rather get out as much on my own account as anybody's.”

“ A *murderer* ! ” gasped the little man. “ But my dear lads—good heavens—no, a thousand times no. I have done nothing wrong, nothing. I am absolutely innocent of any crime. I am as ignorant as yourselves of the reason of the dreadful events that seem to keep happening to me.”

"Will you swear you are?" said Augustus Clickson.

"I swear it," cried the little man eagerly. "I will swear it a thousand times over."

"Well, it's a jolly rum go, then," said Augustus.

"One thing I will at least tell you," said the little man with agitation; "I will tell it you, come what may, though it greatly imperils my secret, for it explains everything. I am here, I am going through these bewildering and dreadful occurrences, I am dwelling in what appears to me to be a nightmare, for one reason, and one reason only. In me you behold an antiquarian."

Why a person should be fleeing down a river for his life from policemen and assassins under an assumed name merely because he was an antiquarian, however, John and Augustus could not see. It seemed to them to explain nothing. But at that moment the tramp of the policeman was heard returning, and with his tramp came the sound of another. The policeman was bringing the inhabitant of No. 8, Poop Lane with him. Whether the inhabitant had been given tuppence to allow himself to be brought

did not transpire, but judging from his appearance he had not. He came in a dogged manner, and in his shirt-sleeves, as one who had been brought forcibly and without explanation, and he had the aspect of having been roused from deep slumber by violence.

“ Now then,” said the policeman, steering him with determination to the edge of the quay, “ ’oo’s that ’ere ? You tell the truth, or you’ll be sorry.”

The stout inhabitant of No. 8, Poop Lane gazed earnestly at the boat and its occupants. After prolonged meditation, he spoke with conviction. “ That there’s Mr. George Chart and them’s ’is nephews.”

“ There ! ” said the little man.

The policeman stood in sullen silence.

Augustus and John looked at each other, and Augustus drew a long breath, and ran his oars out.

“ All right,” he said. “ We’ll take you down the river since you swear it isn’t because there’s anything wrong, that you can’t say who you are or explain anything. But it’s rather a nuisance, and so I tell you, because Hazard and I have a great deal to do.”

“ I am so grateful to you—so very grateful to you,” cried the little man eagerly.

“ It won’t really take us so very long, Clickson,” said John politely.

The dinghy went bobbing out on to the river into the sun and the wind of the summer afternoon, with Augustus rowing, and the little man steering, as far as anybody can be said to steer who does not know how. John, the Charm at his feet, sat in the bows. And as the dinghy reached the middle of the river, all the doors and windows of the little houses round the little quay opened, and their inhabitants came out and went about their business, and the loungers and the children reappeared and reoccupied their customary haunts.

CHAPTER XII

THE THEFT OF THE SLOOP

THE dinghy rocked away down the centre of the river towards the bend of the wide curve upon which the city was built. There were a few small boats plying about on the water, and one of these, which had been lying in the middle of the current some little way down with two men fishing from her, pulled up her anchor as the dinghy came up and went by, and began to move slowly in the same direction. Otherwise there were no craft about, and the flat shores on either hand were covered with sordid little houses, for they were still among the outskirts of the city. The little man sat plunged in thought, absently pulling first one line and then the other as Augustus directed him.

“I think I must be the victim of some extraordinary plot,” he said at last, rousing himself with a sigh. “Do you know, my dear lads, why there was no waterman on that quay this afternoon? I believe it was because the people

belonging to it had all been bribed to keep away so that I shouldn't be able to find anybody to help me get away myself."

John and Augustus received this theory with surprise, but the little man remained unshaken in his conviction.

"That policeman would have caught me like a rat in a trap if it had not been for you," said he.

"Well, if they hadn't been bribed to keep away," said Augustus Clickson, with decision, "he would have found a waterman to row after us and catch you in spite of us, so they didn't do themselves much good with *that* trick."

The boat from which the two men had been fishing, and which had been coming after them till then in a leisurely manner, now suddenly quickened her pace. She drew abreast, the two men in her rowing steadily and quietly. As she went by, not an oar's length from the dinghy, one of the men paused in his stroke for an instant, took something out of his pocket, and threw it across to John, then he took up the stroke again, and rowed on, and the boat went on down the river, travelling swiftly out of sight.

John picked up the missile in surprise. It was a small stone wrapped in a piece of paper

upon which some words were written. There was no name outside and no signature, and John read the words aloud :

“ I know you are chasing me. You know who defies you. I shall serve my country in spite of you, and I shall escape, but if you yourself wish to escape the menaces which surround you, chase me no more. This is a fair warning. There will be no second.”

John and Augustus and the little man sat and looked at each other for a moment in silence.

“ That’s for *me*,” said the little man, drawing a long breath, “ and sometimes I think I’m in a nightmare. I am not chasing anybody. I do not know anyone to chase, and I don’t know the faintest reason why anybody should chase me.”

“ Don’t you even know who wrote it ? ” said Augustus Clickson.

“ Of course I don’t,” said the little man. “ How should I ? ”

John and Augustus gazed with amazed interest at a person so surrounded by mystery, and the dinghy went rocking down the river at her own sweet will, till a sudden howl of indignation warned them that she was rapidly approaching

the thronged and busy centre of the river, and Augustus awoke to this fact just in time to prevent her burying her round nose under the bows of a barge which was coming up stream with difficulty under the exertions of two men with long poles, whose wrath at having to deflect from their hard won course by several inches was very great.

“ Why don’t you look where you’re going ? ” they howled.

“ Why don’t *you* ? ” roared Augustus.

“ We *was* lookin’ where we was going,” shouted the bargees indignantly.

“ Then you’d the less business to run into us,” roared Augustus, and while the bargees were still searching for a reply to this truth the dinghy bumped her way down the length of the barge and rolled out on the tide once more.

The crowded state of the river now made conversation difficult, however, and John kept that look out in the bows which was rendered advisable by the difficulty the little man experienced in remembering that if you pulled a boat’s rudder rope one way she did not go the other, and by his liability to become entangled in both the ropes even when pulling

the right one. They once or twice had a miss which the occupants of the missed craft refused to consider as good as a mile, and Augustus consequently parted in indignation from several watermen and boatmen on their road. But on the whole the dinghy bobbed on under the wide bridges of the great thoroughfares of the city with credit to her crew; and so came again to silent outskirts and deserted beginnings. Here, at a little quay very similar to the one they had left, they found the little man's boat. She was a small half-decked sloop of cutter rig, old and weather-beaten, but with a seaworthy aspect. The little man said that he had hired her by telegram from an agent before he came to Under, that he might be able to get about the river as he wished, without raising comment or attention by hiring. As they approached, the boat from which the paper had been thrown to John suddenly shot out from the quay, with the same men in it, and rowed away down the river without taking any notice of them. The little man, with a view to trying to discover who it was had sent the message, hailed them loudly. But the men never lifted their heads, and were soon out of sight.

John and Augustus and the little man were making the dinghy fast to the stern of the sloop when a voice said from the quay, "Is that your boat, sir?"; and they turned to see a stout man, with a short fair beard, standing on the edge, and looking wistfully at the sloop.

"Yes," said the little man.

"I have had bad news," said the stout man. He spoke with a slight foreign accent, but his tone was frank and pleasant. "I beg your pardon for addressing you, but I am in trouble. I have just had word that my wife lies very ill, dangerously ill, in my home across the river. It is four miles round by the nearest bridge, and the ferry-boat is not plying to-day. She leaks, and is bottom up in the yard. My wife is foreign, as I am myself, and she is alone."

He paused, and stood looking humbly at the little man.

"I am very sorry to hear it, my poor fellow," said the little man sympathetically, "but what can I do for you?"

"If you would let me sail across in your boat?" said the stout man, deprecatingly. "The wind is coming straight down the river. It

would only take ten minutes. My home is exactly opposite."

"I would sail you across with pleasure," said the little man, "but I am not very well versed in the sailing of ships, and the man I usually take with me is not here."

"I could sail her across myself," said the stout man, "I have sailed boats all my life. And there would be certain to be someone on the other shore who could bring her back for you."

"Then let us lose no time," said the little man.

Before he departed he pressed a sovereign each upon John and Augustus, and when they would have refused he said that they had done more for him than he could tell them without telling them too much, and that he wished this little present were not the only thing he could do for them in return.

They lingered a moment to watch the sloop sail away before they themselves departed on their long delayed business. The stout man evidently knew all about handling a boat, and he had her under able control before the tide had carried her ten yards. The little man sat

benevolently in the cockpit and watched his proceedings with a sympathetic smile.

As she stood out into the river, a step sounded on the quay, and a policeman, who had apparently strolled down there on his beat and was looking at the departing boat, came up to John and Augustus.

"Where's that sloop off to?" he said.

"To the other side," said John and Augustus.

"Know who's aboard her?" said the policeman.

"Yes," said John and Augustus.

"When's she coming back?" said the policeman.

"In ten minutes," said John and Augustus.

The policeman looked after her another moment, glanced round the quay, and then went away again up the little lane that led from the quay.

John and Augustus were now alone. The few loafers and children that had been on the quay when they arrived had departed to their teas, and a strong smell of bloaters was consequently arising on the air. The place was silent, save for the perpetual slap, slap of the water as it poured past the river wall, and set the one or

two old tubs which were tied there pulling at their ropes. They cast a last glance at the sloop as they turned to go—and paused in surprise. She had suddenly brought up into the wind in mid-stream. For a moment she hung in the sunlit haze head to the breeze; then she swung round as though she had been struck round, and the next instant she was drifting down stream broadside on, with her bows pointing to the further shore. John and Augustus stared at this phenomenon in astonished conjecture. It was evident that something had gone wrong, though what it was they were at a loss to make out. As they gazed a figure suddenly sprang into the stern, and hauled the dinghy alongside. Then it pulled a second figure out of the cockpit, pushed it into the dinghy, and shoved the dinghy adrift. John and Augustus gazed aghast and incredulous. The sloop was so far out in mid-stream that they could only just, by intent watching, see what was happening. They saw the boom hauled in and the sloop come slowly up into the wind again. Then the figure at the helm rammed it hard a-port and round came the sloop, her bows down stream. The boom swung out square off; her canvas filled. In less

time than it takes to tell it, she was away, heading seaward down the river like a bird ; while far in her wake an apparently empty dinghy bobbed up and down.

Considering that John had never had steering gear in his hands before, and that Augustus, wrought upon by anxiety, gave his directions in a tornado of agitated booming, the old tub into which they flung themselves kept a creditably straight course from the quay to the derelict dinghy. They reached the latter and seized her and looked anxiously into her. The little man was lying trussed in rope like a cocoon at the bottom of the boat, gazing skywards in agitated meditation.

"Sometimes," he said with a sigh, when he saw the faces of John and Augustus appearing over the edge of the dinghy, "I think I'm in a nightmare."

They got into the dinghy, and, tying the old tub to her stern, released the little man from the rope with the aid of Augustus Clickson's clasp knife. Then they all sat and looked at each other a moment, recovering.

The sloop was already far down the reach to the next bend of the river, and the haze of distance was beginning to dim her outlines.

“ Well,” said Augustus, drawing a long breath, “ they *have* done it this time and no mistake.”

“ But why has he done it at all ? ” cried the little man, in despairing bewilderment. “ Why did he take my ship, and leave *me* ? What did he want my ship for ? What will he do with her ? ”

“ He can do what he jolly well pleases with her,” said Augustus. “ In this weather, and she the size she is, he can put out for the open sea and make port anywhere he pleases.”

“ The open sea ? ” cried the little man with a start. “ But he’s got my brown bag aboard her—my bag with all my notes and papers ! The work of years is in my papers. And he will discover who I am, and my secret will become known, and all my labour will have been in vain. Oh, my dear lads, my dear lads, let the ship go, but I must, I must, recover my papers ! ” cried the little man, in growing agitation, and he wrung his hands.

“ Well, I don’t see how we’re going to catch a full-rigged sloop running before the wind on an ebb-tide in a dinghy, and so I tell you, and there’s no way out of it,” said Augustus Clickson.

“ If she’s running before the wind now, she

won't be running before it when she gets round the bend, though, will she?" said John, considering.

Augustus Clickson's expression changed. His gaze travelled past John down the reach of the river.

"Won't she be running before the wind?" said the little man eagerly. "What will she be running before? What does a ship do when it leaves off running? Does it stop?"

"It doesn't unless it's got a lunatic aboard it," said Augustus. "She tacks."

As neither John nor the little man had much idea of what tacking meant except that it brought before them a vague vision of large white stitches in unmade clothing, they could only sit and look expectantly at Augustus.

"She tacks," said Augustus, "and tacking in a falling tide is no joke and so I tell you. If that beast doesn't know the river jolly well, he'll probably stick on a sand-bank in the next reach. Come on."

Two minutes later, with the old tub cast off astern, they were travelling down the river as fast as the dinghy could take them.

They met no boats on their way. Not even a

steamer cared to face the sand-locked river of Under in a head wind and a falling tide unless she had to. The water was sinking from the shores on either side as though it were sinking out of a bath in which the waste-pipe had been opened. Half way down the reach the houses ceased and the plains began, covered thickly with bushes and bracken as high as a man's head. The smoke of the city was gone, and low down on the horizon great clouds were gathering darkly, the first clouds that had been seen in Under for many weeks, while the changing wind blew fitfully, shifting always further into the south. As for the sloop, it had been long out of sight.

But as they reached the end of the long straight stretch, John, who was kneeling in the bows and leaning forward to catch the first glimpse of the next stretch, suddenly gave a start that nearly sent him into the water. "*She is on a sand-bank!*" he cried; and round the bend came the dinghy, and there the sloop lay. There she lay!—stranded—in shoaling water near the left bank. She must have come round the curve before the wind began to shift into the south, and finding herself obliged to leave the

deep-water channel, had hauled her wind to start beating to windward up the reach. But she could not have finished even her first tack before she struck, for she lay very near the beginning of the reach.

The stout man was still on board. He had run out a sweep, and was pushing on it too busily at first to hear the approaching dinghy. He glanced up a minute later, however, and saw her. For a moment he stood transfixed, staring as if he could not believe his eyes. Then, without a sound or sign of emotion, he cast a swift glance round the horizon and up into the sky, and held his hand up in the wind. Then he dropped the sweep, ran to the bows, and swung himself over into the water.

“On, go, get, catch him,” cried the little man incoherently. “He may have my papers with him. Run, my dear lads, run. Catch him, catch him.”

Augustus redoubled his efforts, and lying flat on his back with every stroke, rowed thirty to the minute. The stout man ran swiftly through the shallow water on the sand-bank, and dropped into the channel of deep water between it and the shore. They saw him go shooting shorewards hand over hand.

"He'll escape, he'll escape," cried the little man, and, in the agitation of the moment, he pulled the wrong rope with violence. The dinghy, still rushing along at top speed under the impetus of Augustus Clickson's frantic rowing, turned upon the sand-bank with energy, and climbed it as if she were a member of the Alpine Club, and Augustus and the little man ran into each other's arms, and disappeared in a mutual heap in the bottom of the boat, while John went over the bows into the shallow water. By the time he had rescued himself, and the others had separated themselves, and the dinghy had been pushed into deep water again, even the sound of the stout man's flight through the bracken had ceased. He was gone, and to look for him in those miles of man-high bush and fern would have been like looking for an eyelash on a beach.

"If my papers are only still there," gasped the little man, "nothing else matters."

They scrambled upon board the sloop, and the first thing they saw was the brown bag. It was lying in the cockpit where the little man had dropped it, and it was still locked. The little man clasped it to his breast, and shook hands

again and again with John and Augustus. "When my labours in Under are over," he cried, "I shall insist upon renewing acquaintance with you. I shall find some means of repaying you. I will, I must, after all you have done for me."

It proved rather a difficult business to get the sloop off the sand-bank, but by united and strenuous effort they managed it at last, and started on their return journey. It cannot be said that the sloop sailed back to Under quite as beautifully as she had sailed away. Augustus steered, and John and the little man managed the sails with what might truly be called varying success, since it only varied into success for moments, and by mistake, as it were. Augustus was at times perilously near booming, but luckily he knew the deep water channels well, and the wind had not only shifted several points further into the south, but was blowing with momentarily increasing strength. The clouds were now coming up from all quarters. It was dark with more than the darkness of the shadow of the cliff and the advancing evening when the sloop slowly approached the little quay once more, and took up her old moorings. They sent a waterman off in the dinghy to find the boat they

had cast adrift ; and then the little man insisted on their coming with him to his Inn that John might get his wet clothes properly dried before they started on their own business. He had done the return journey in an old jersey of William's which was fortunately on board ; but it was too voluminous and overwhelming a garment to be worn in the streets. So he resumed his own clothes, and they went to the Waysend Inn.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WAYSEND INN

THE Waysend Inn stood in a street some little way back from the river, in the thick of that dark and crowded neighbourhood of narrow ways into which John and Augustus had first come wandering on the occasion of their trial of the Charm in the shop of Jabez the Jeweller. It stood at a corner, with a main street in front of it, and a little deserted lane at the side, and had thus two entrances, one a bar entrance, and the other a quiet side-door. Loafers were hanging in numbers round the front of the house, and inside the bar the bar-tenders were driving a roaring trade with customers, who were most of them roaring too; but in the little side lane there was nobody about, and John and Augustus and the little man made their entrance unobserved.

“I chose this strange and sordid neighbourhood,” said the little man with a sigh, as he

pushed open the side door, "because I thought I could bury myself in it, and go about my work in Under unnoticed. I do not seem to have succeeded, I am sorry to say. But it is not the fault of the honest people of the house. I told them I was here on secret business, and desired that no endeavour should be made to discover who I was, or why I came, and they, my landlord and his son, have observed my wishes very faithfully, and have asked no questions, and expressed no curiosity. I have all my letters addressed to the post-office, of course. But come upstairs, and we will have some tea while your wet clothes are being dried."

It occurred to both John and Augustus that the little man could hardly have chosen a neighbourhood in which the coming and going of anyone of decent or prosperous appearance would have been noticed more, and it also seemed likely that to tell people of the existence of a secret, and beg them not to try to penetrate it, was not exactly the best way of preventing them from doing so. These matters, however, were the business of the little man, from whom they would soon be parting in order to go about their own business, and though Augustus thrust

his hands in his pockets and leapt abstractedly once or twice on high, he abstained from further comment.

The house was large and ancient, and it had evidently been built in the old days before trade and traffic had left the little quays near which it stood. The side door opened into a large square hall, round the upper part of which ran a gallery. A staircase rose at one end, and at the other swing doors hung between the hall and the front part of the house. These, as they passed them, the little man pushed open for a moment, letting in a distant roar of voices and clatter from the bar. He called down the passage, and being answered, as it seemed, in a startled accent, he ordered tea for three.

They met no one on their way upstairs. No voice or step sounded in this part of the house. It lay silent and empty, and dark with the darkness of the coming storm.

"I think I must be the only lodger they have," said the little man as he mounted. "I have never seen anyone else about since I came, though I have sometimes heard steps and voices." His bedroom and his sitting-room opened on to the gallery side by side, and John had just

exchanged his wet clothes for a dressing-gown of the little man's, when a knock was heard at the sitting-room door, and a big black-haired man appeared on the threshold.

"Good-evening, Landlord," said the little man.

The Landlord answered nothing. He looked once vacantly round the room, and then he fixed his eyes on the little man, and stood breathing heavily.

"We should like some tea, Landlord," said the little man mildly, "and please take these clothes to be dried."

"Then it *was* you a callin' down the passage just now, Mr. Chart," said the Landlord, with an effort.

"Yes, it was I," said the little man, "I called for some tea."

"I'll bring it," said the Landlord, and he took the clothes and vanished.

"A curious fellow," said the little man. "He seems sometimes to be afflicted with some sort of mental trouble. But very kind-hearted. He really appears almost to watch for my return, and I can never leave the house without his observing me go."

The Landlord brought up the tea, and, as he

re-entered the room, his eye fell on John. He paused, and after a moment said: "'Aven't I seen you somewhere before, sir?"

John looked at him in surprise, and then suddenly recognising him, said: "Yes. Up in the forest—you were in the Hawker's Glade."

"Ah!" said the Landlord gloomily. He went on with his duties in silence.

"Did you find the Hawker in the end and get what you wanted?" said John politely.

A darker shadow fell on the Landlord's face. "No," he replied. After a moment he added with a sombre aspect: "No, I never found the 'Awker, an' I never got what I wanted. I never tried again. It's never no good trying nothink." He took up his tray, and left the room.

Half an hour later, having had their tea, and John's clothes being dry, he and Augustus said good-bye to the little man at the side door, whence he was going to the General Post Office to call for his letters. He had taken their addresses that he might renew his acquaintance with them when his secret labours in Under should be over, and he thanked them again and again for all they had done for him. John, who had never had a whole sovereign in his possession before,

felt that, in spite of all their exertions, mystifications, and surprises, still greater thanks were due from him.

“ Well, *that* was a rum go ! ” said Augustus Clickson, putting his hands in his pockets, and leaping thoughtfully as they walked away.

“ I’m afraid they’ll get him directly, now we’re not there to save him,” said John.

“ Well, we can’t go on saving him for ever,” said Augustus, with decision. “ We’ve been saving him the whole afternoon already. He’s the sort of little man you’d always have to save. Come on. We’ve scarcely enough time left to do anything in as it is.”

So they hastened through the streets. The wind was gone ; and overhead, piled in black mountains one upon the other, the clouds lay motionless. There was a strange stillness up there, its base appearing to rest upon the housetops, under which the noise and turmoil of the streets echoed loudly and oddly, as under a roof.

They had gone some little distance when John suddenly stopped with a gasp. “ Clickson ! ” he said, “ I’ve forgotten the Charm ! ”

“ You *haven’t* ! ” ejaculated Augustus.

"I have," said John. "I left it standing in a corner of the sitting-room."

"Well, you *are* an ass!" said Augustus, wrathfully. "As if we hadn't wasted enough time already! It will be hours too late to do anything by the time we get to the North Quarter. A very little more, John Hazard, and I shall have had enough of it, and so I warn you. Cut back this instant, and get it, and don't stand talking. I shall wait here. I'm not coming all that way back with you, and you needn't think it."

John ran back at full speed. He arrived at his destination breathless, and, turning into the side street, entered the Inn by the side door, and went through the hall. He met no one on his way. The dusk of the waiting storm, and of the advancing hour of the evening still lay over the old house unlit by lamp or candle. He went cautiously upstairs, feeling his way. The sitting-room was so dark that he had to cross it slowly step by step, with his hands out before him. Under his light tread, the old boards hardly creaked.

He reached the corner in which he had left the Charm, and found it still there, and clasped it thankfully, and turned to go. He got safely

across the room, and, as he stepped through the door on to the gallery he heard the sound of the swing door closing itself below, and a deep and gloomy voice came up out of the dim hall. "Oh, William ! William !" it said.

The voice so evidently believed itself to be in the hearing of one person only that John involuntarily stopped, and before he could move again, a second voice said in faltering accents : "What's 'appened, father ?"

"*Nothink's* 'appened, William," announced the first voice, significantly, "nothink whatever, in spite of all 'is dodges. The sloop is safe at the quay, for I sent out to see, an' 'e's come back safe and sound 'isself, an' 'as gone out to get 'is letters."

A step suddenly made itself heard, and the swing door swung open again, letting in a momentary roar of sound from the front of the house. A third voice arose in the hall.

"You speak alone ? The house is empty ?"

"Yes," said the trembling voice of William. "'E's come back, but 'e's gone out again to get 'is letters."

"Well, I am come back too," said the third voice, "The plan failed."

“What ’appened?” said William, faintly.

“Oh, William, William!” groaned the Landlord.

“It nearly succeeded,” said the third voice, bitterly. “But for an ill-chance it would have completely succeeded, and I should have been out at sea with the papers by now, and safe. It was a bold stroke. It deserved to succeed. But the tide was falling, and the wind changing. I ran the boat on to a sand-bank.”

“Oh Lord, oh Lord!” wailed William.

“The English spy came after me,” said the third voice, “I had to swim to escape, and I have been sitting outside the city in wet clothes for hours, waiting for the dark. It was a brave plan. Had there been the least chance of my being able to take the sloop out of the river, even in a falling tide and with darkness coming on, I would have downed him and the lads, and done it. But the wind was changing, and there was none.”

The gasp of William, and the Landlord’s groan, drowned the gasp that John was unable to repress. There was a pause, and the sound of slow steps came up through the dusk, as though the owner of the third voice were pacing up and down.

“Jabez ain’t give nothing away yet,” said the faltering voice of William. “They don’t know nothink about the papers. They’re still only looking for you because they think you ’ad something to do with the jewels because of them ’aving seen you about ’is place.”

“It makes little difference why they are on my track, since they *are* on it,” said the third voice, with cold impatience. “The departure of every train and boat is watched, and this place is like a trap with its great wall, and its two ways out, and both shut. It is not *I* that have bungled! Why was the package sent to such a place as this for me to take charge of it? Why was an old Jew, already under suspicion for theft and worse, chosen as the go-between? And up above me sits that English spy, watching, watching, ready to pounce at any moment. He has the devil’s own luck, that English spy. I have let him know his business is known, and tried to frighten him off. I have tried to get him put out of the way till I had escaped. Jabez has laid false information against him with the police—all the righteous and unrighteous forces in Under have been set to work to delay him, and none of them have done it, even for a day.

He is not working with the police—that much is certain. He is some secret service man, working on some private information from abroad. He is a fool—an amateur and a fool—but the merest chance might direct him rightly any day. He does not know yet on whom to fall, but how do we know that he has not even now already completed his observations? It was no chance brought him to watch at this inn, with his secret business, and his ship to watch the river, and his daily prying and hunting, and his assumed name, and his foreign letters, and his locked bag. I would have taken that bag with me off the sloop to-day, but that I had to swim for it. I had had no time to break the lock, and get the papers. And but for *you*,” said the voice, speaking with sudden fierceness, “but for you, I would have had him tied up in the house, and out of mischief long ago, and one danger, at least, removed. It is you who add this risk to the risks I must suffer in the service of my beloved country, you ——”

“You ain’t English, an’ it’s the same to me ’ow you suffer in the service of your ’orrid country,” said the voice of the Landlord, agitated but defiant. “I won’t ’ave nobody touched in my

'ouse, I won't, an' there's an end on it. If it wasn't that it's never no use tryin' nothink, I'd a tried to stop it altogether afore now, an' it's not the upstairs lodger as would 'ave found 'isself tied up. I can't 'elp what 'appens outside, but if anybody touches anybody in my 'ouse, I go to the police in that moment, and tells 'em everythink I knows, even if it's my only son I 'as to tell against. Oh, William, William ! ”

“ I thought there was money in it, father,” said the voice of William, weeping. “ An' there ain't nothing been give away yet. Old Jabez's old daughter 'as got 'erself off somewheres since Jabez was took, an' the child too, so they can't make *them* tell anythink.”

“ There are too many people about who can tell things for me to dare stay another moment with the papers in this city,” said the third voice. “ Now that Jabez is arrested, and the Englishman has seen me, the game is all but up. I must make one more attempt, and it will be a desperate one. I shall try to get off on the 7.30 goods train to-night, in disguise, and make my escape from that halt in the hills. Get the cart ready, William, and you will come with me to help me,

And bring me the Englishman's bag. He will not have taken it to the post-office. Locked or not, I will have his papers, and find out the sources of his information."

"I won't 'ave 'is bag took," said the Landlord, agitatedly.

"You will hold your tongue," said the third voice, fiercely, "an' remember that if I am taken, your son is too."

"Oh, William, William!" said the Landlord, with a groan of collapse.

Departing steps sounded in the hall, and there was the noise of a closing door. Silence ensued in the hall for a moment. Then the groan of the Landlord rose again. "Oh, William, William!"

"I thought there was money in it, father," said William, weeping.

"A thing as 'as money in it, William," said the Landlord, "orften 'as ruing in it, too. An' ruing it 'ill be if them papers is found in this 'ouse. Oh William, William, why didn't you keep out of it as I told you!"

"I didn't seem able to, father," wailed William, "I don't seem able to keep out of nothink."

"Perhaps if I'd got that there Charm as I

went arter,” said the Landlord, with a sigh, “it might ’ave ’elped you a bit. But it didn’t seem worth trying again. I never ’ave no ’eart to try things twice over. I’ve often thought of tryin’ ways to keep you outer mischief, but they none on ’em seemed some’ow worth beginnin’. Why don’t ’e send them papers away by post, William, if ’e can’t get ’em out of Under ’isself ? ”

“ There’s been one lot gone wrong in the past already,” said William, weeping. “ ’E’s *got* to get these out ’isself.”

“ Oh, William, William ! ” groaned the Landlord.

“ I mus’ go an’ put the ’orse in the trap,” said William’s faltering voice, and his sniffs died away with his trembling steps and those of his father.

Augustus Clickson, waiting at the street corner in much the same condition as an over-charged cannon without a target, opened his mouth wide to discharge himself with fury as he caught sight of John running towards him through the crowds, and shut it again abruptly as John came nearer and he saw his face. He plunged his hands into his pockets and leapt.

“ What’s up ? ” he said.

“ That stout man who stole the sloop is in the

Waysend Inn," said John, panting, "and he's going to escape out of Under by the goods train to-night and take the papers out of the brown bag with him because he thinks the little man is a spy."

Augustus stood staring, momentarily bereft of words. John strove to tell him further details, but it is difficult to convey a clear impression when you have no clear impression to convey. Long before John had finished trying to tell him what he had heard, Augustus was in the same chaotic mental condition as John himself. Jews, jewels, papers, ruin, policemen, spies, secrets, mysteries and brown bags all seemed to be mixed up in the same inextricable chaos together. It was clear that there were two people with secrets in the Waysend Inn, and the fact that they had both chosen the same inn in which to keep their secrets had evidently resulted in dreadful confusion. The police seemed to be as much confused as anybody, since they were chasing one man for something wrong he hadn't done, though he had done something wrong and was apparently still doing it, and the other man for having done something wrong when he had done nothing at all. More than this

it was impossible, in the haste of the moment, to make out; except that whatever the little man's secret might be, it could not be that he was a spy, since he had definitely declared that he was chasing nobody and knew no reason why anybody should chase him. Finally, one thing emerged from the mystery, and remained clear. John and Augustus must postpone their own business again at once and resume the business of saving the little man, for unless they could find him before half-past seven that night, the contents of his brown bag would be taken out of Under and lost to him for ever.

John had tried to discover the brown bag himself before leaving the Inn, but after feeling about in the dark for some minutes, he had heard a distant door open, and had precipitately fled lest he should be himself discovered and detained. For a moment he and Augustus debated whether it would not be better to look for a policeman and tell him sufficient to cause him to arrest the stout man in the Waysend Inn merely for being a thief, but the difficulty of telling a policeman sufficient without telling him too much made them hesitate. They were far from sure, remembering the events of the afternoon,

whether the little man would not almost rather his papers were taken out of Under than that they should be saved and seen by a policeman and he himself be obliged to reveal his secret.

As they started for the General Post Office, the clocks of the city struck a quarter to seven. They raced across the bridge. The river down which they had travelled through a sunlit haze that afternoon now lay like a band of steel below them, dark under the black heavens, and far away on the horizon a sudden low rumble rose and died away. "There's the storm," said a man among the hurrying crowds, and John and Augustus hastened their steps.

"If we could only get a lift!" panted John, as they turned down a quieter street.

"We'll stop the next cart going our way," said Augustus.

But the effort only seemed to have occasioned them more delay. It happened to be a butcher's cart that came racketing up behind them in haste to get out of the storm, and when the butcher pulled up within an inch of the waving and dauntless Augustus, and found why he had been stopped, he was beside himself with indignation and surprise.

“Give you a lift—I never ’eard such cheek ! I’ll see you further first, you rascals !” he cried. “Stopping tired ’orses an’ busy men on their road to save your own lazy legs. Get out of the way or I’ll drive you down,” and he lashed his steaming horse and was away down the street and out of sight before Augustus could get out another word.

Augustus was so enraged that he became momentarily speechless, and he had just reached the point of “I’ve had enough of this, John Hazard, and so I tell you. If you like to go on looking after fools who can’t look after themselves, you can go on by——” when a cart came rattling furiously towards them down the street and drew up by them with a clatter and splutter and a slither of the horse’s hoofs.

“Was I himperlite jus’ now, as it were ?” inquired the Butcher’s voice, mildly.

John and Augustus were so taken aback that Augustus forgot his rage and they both gazed at him in amazement.

“Was I what you’d call himperlite just now ?” said the Butcher again.

“Yes, you were, and so I tell you,” said Augustus, recovering.

“I do get a bit short Satterday nights,” said the Butcher, apologetically. “Overdruv, as it were, both my ’orse an’ me. But not himperlite ! Come now, you’d hardly call that himperlite ! Himperlite is the larst thing I’d be ! Was it a lift you wanted ? Pleased, I’m sure, if I’m goin’ your way.”

He helped the astonished John and Augustus in, and offered them a piece of his rug, and the next moment they were all rattling down the street towards the General Post Office together behind the steaming horse.

“I ’ope you don’t find yourselves ’urt in your feelings any longer, so to speak ? ” inquired the Butcher, as they turned the corner.

“No, thank you,” said John, politely. “It’s very kind of you.” He had recognized the Butcher, but the Butcher had evidently not recognized him, and John was not sure whether it would be kind to remind the Butcher of their acquaintanceship, seeing the circumstances under which it had been made.

“Yes,” said the Butcher, with satisfaction. “*Kind* ! Yes, that’s what I ham. Kind. Ah, I ’ad a lesson in himperliteness once sech as you’d never forget, never. If you ever find

yourself bein' himperlite, you take a warning by me. Oh, what a dreadful thing it is to be himperlite. You remember me when next you feel yourselves gettin' a bit short, as might 'appen to any of us. Oh, what a lesson it was. Not a thing you'd risk twice, it wasn't, an' 'im no more than a street 'awker as you'd 'ardly stop to pick up if you knocked 'im over. But I'd pick up *hanybody* now, I would. Rich or pore, beggar or prince, himperlite is what I never ham to no one, an' a better-tempered man you'd 'ardly meet in a day's march. You don't risk a lesson like that twice in a lifetime, you don't. I'm leavin' Under shortly for a better job, but if I was to go to the ends of the world I shouldn't forget a lesson like that."

He put them down at the post office, and drove off beaming with a happy consciousness of his own good heart and politeness, and John and Augustus hurried up the steps. As they did so the clock above the door struck a quarter past seven.

The man at the letter counter said that Mr. George Chart had not yet been for his letters, and John and Augustus made a hurried search of the great building and then of its approaches and

the streets surrounding it. But the little man was nowhere to be seen, and the long hand of the clock was at five when they again looked up at it. Five minutes more, and the goods train would be gone, and the papers out of the brown bag would probably go with it.

John and Augustus stopped and looked at each other. Augustus put his hands in his pockets and leapt. As far as the finding of the little man before half-past seven was concerned, they were beaten.

With a vague idea of seeing whether the man from the Inn was really going to succeed in getting off by the goods train, and with a still vaguer idea of trying to find some means at the last moment by which they could succeed in stopping him from doing so, they hurried across the street and into the great Central Station. But at the barrier of the goods platform to which they asked their way, they were stopped themselves.

"No passenger train from this platform," said the official, who was passing out.

"We know," said John, breathlessly. "We want to see something about a goods train. Please let us through."

“Nobody goes through this ’ere goods barrier excep’ on business,” said the official, severely. “What business ’ave you two lads got with a goods train? An’ if it was the seven-thirty you wanted, she’s off.”

As he spoke a whistle sounded from beyond the barrier, and the big clock in the station struck the half-hour. The goods train was gone.

While John and Augustus stood gazing at each other, wondering what to begin to try to do next, the barrier swung open to let someone through, and William came running out and hurried away with a pale face, without looking at anyone. The next moment, walking forth with a mildly jaunty and benevolent air, there came the little figure of the little man. He paused in pleased surprise on seeing John and Augustus.

“My dear lads!” he said. “Do we meet again? Have you already finished your business? I have not been so expeditious, and I must hasten now to the post office. But I was delayed by a touching little incident. As I was crossing the station, having come hither by train, I saw an unfortunate old country man, almost inarticulate with age and anxiety, in great distress

because this good fellow here would not let him through to the goods train. He had lost the last passenger train home to his village, and wanted to be allowed to travel by the goods train. William was with him. He was a friend of poor William's, so I was able to speak for him to the Inspector. I was very glad to be able to help the distressed old fellow out of his difficulty. He had a dreadful cold; he was hardly able to speak. And I am much obliged to you, my dear sir," said the little man, holding out his hand to the official, "for enabling me to help him. I made it all right with the guard. Allow me to shake hands with you. Dear me, you have dropped ten shillings. Allow me. Good-night, good-night. My dear lads, let us not part at once, since we have so unexpectedly met again. Come with me to the post office if you have finished your own business."

But John and Augustus stood staring at him, in a dismay so great that Augustus was unable even to leap. The official had gone gratified upon his way, and they were alone. John could find no words at all; Augustus could only ejaculate in horror, "My gracious, you *have* been and done it now, so I tell you."

The little man, with an instant premonition of disaster, looked at them with a paling face.

"Done?" he said in a faltering voice. "What have I done?"

"You've helped the chap who stole your sloop this afternoon to get safely away," said Augustus. "That's what you've done. It's he that has been trying to get at you all this time because he thinks you're a spy, and he's taken the papers out of your brown bag and got clear away by that goods train."

"Am I dreaming?" said the little man faintly, putting his hand against the goods barrier for support. "I *must* be dreaming. Say it again."

Augustus said it again, and bade John tell what he had overheard in the Inn. John told it as best he could, but even at his best it was a confusing story.

"This is a nightmare," said the little man in trembling accents. "It can be nothing but a nightmare. My Landlord—William—it is impossible, incredible! Who was the man, why was he hiding in the Inn, why did he think I was a spy, what was he doing, of what was he afraid? And do you tell me I have just helped

him to get away in disguise by the goods train ? Impossible, impossible ! I'm dreaming, I must be dreaming. But oh, my dear lads, my dear lads," cried the little man, with a sudden violent start, "did you say he had taken away my papers ? "

John and Augustus were obliged to make it clear that this was what they had said.

There was a dreadful silence.

"My *papers* !" said the little man, slowly and solemnly. "He has taken my *papers*. I have helped him to escape by the goods train, and he had my papers. The work of years is in my papers. The labour of years is lost if I have lost my papers."

He put his hand to his head and leaned against the goods barrier. "My mind is going," he said faintly. "I am bewildered. Let me collect myself. Let us collect ourselves, my dear lads. Let us be brave. There is only one thing that really matters in all this—I must get back my papers. Let us now consider carefully and clearly how we can get back my papers."

Alas, the longer and more carefully they considered, the clearer it only became that there was apparently no way whatever of getting back the papers.

The goods train would not stop till she slowed down far away at the halt beyond the uplands, and there the old man would descend to go to his village home—and disappear into space. They thought of telegraphing ahead of the train, but a hurried visit to the telegraph office revealed the fact there was no telegraph office at the halt, nor anyone there to receive a telegram even had it been possible to send one. The first station, at Wayport, twenty miles further on, was the first place to which they could telegraph; and when the goods train reached that station there would be no old man travelling on her. They might hire a special to chase her, but there would always be the possibility of the old man's slipping away in the darkness at the first slowing down; and they could not in any event stop a train and arrest a man upon her and take papers from him, without first giving very adequate reasons and explanations to the police and obtaining a warrant for such a proceeding. This would take so long that the goods train might have reached and left the halt before they could overtake her, and it also involved the immediate revelation of the little man's secret and identity—a step to which he was still despairingly averse unless it

was certain of success. There seemed absolutely no way out of it.

They left the telegraph office, which was on the market-place, and walked slowly along by the market. The little man went with a stony face, stricken and silent. John and Augustus walked along with him. They felt they could not leave him for their own business when such disaster had just overtaken his. The Saturday night market was in full swing, and its noise went up to the tremendous and lowering skies that hung silently over the city. Suddenly a voice rose above the turmoil. "Staves to sell, staves to sell," it cried, and John stopped with a start.

"There's the Hawker," he said, "let's ask *him*. There must be a way out; there's always a way out. Let's find the Hawker."

Even as he spoke, a blast of wind dropped out of the sky and struck the city. There came a blaze that lit every startled face in the market-place with a dreadful flame, and showed the great cliff for miles, standing huge and inscrutable in the blackness over Under. Then, with a roar that shook the foundations of the houses, the worst storm ever known in the city—the storm that ended the most brilliant summer that had

passed over it since the days when old Mother Letitlie was a girl—broke upon Under. In the light of the first flash, a man with a load on his shoulders stepped out from the crowd in the market, and stood before them.

“Hawker!” cried John.

“Come with me,” said the Hawker; and he laid his hand on the shoulder of the little man.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HAWKER LEAVES UNDER

AUGUSTUS CLICKSON and John, left alone in the confusion and uproar of the market-place, did not stay there long. The storm seemed to be actually down in the city itself, so near and simultaneous were flash and explosion. One booth after another was going down with a crash, and the air was filled with shrieks and flying slates and débris torn from the stalls. Some of the braver market people were trying to save their goods, but the majority had abandoned them in terror. Crowds rushed past John and Augustus seeking shelter, and they were swept and hustled from side to side.

“Let’s get out of this,” said Augustus, as they held together for fear of being separated. “It can’t last long at this rate. Let’s get into some quiet street and look for a doorway, and when the storm’s over, we can start out again and finish up the Charm.”

They made their way with difficulty—Augustus fighting for a road with the irritation that always filled him when he found himself opposed—up the first street they came to that led from the market-place, but every doorway they saw was already filled with terrified people, and they had to push on as best they could, drenched with the furious rain and dazed by the incessant alternation of glare and roar.

They had nearly reached the end of the street when suddenly, close behind them, a door opened and a hand came out and grasped John by the arm. "Come in, come in quick, my dears," said a benevolent voice; and before the surprised John realized what was happening he found himself drawn in out of the street, and the hand had emerged again and drawn Augustus in beside him.

"I went to the shop-door to see if it was 'oldin' all right," said the voice, "an' there was you a drowndin' all by yourselves outside. You're the perlite little boy as come arter 'Enery's place, aren't you, my dear, and I'm sure I'm pleased to see you again. Come in, come in outer the shop, do, an' 'ave some supper an' get orf your wet things."

John and Augustus, recovering from their surprise, followed the stout woman through the curtained glass-door into a little sitting-room.

“Sit down by the fire,” she said, “an’ get outer your wet coats while I dry them, an’ I’ll make you a drop of ’ot tea. Oh, my goodness, what a storm for you to be out in! Never do I remember such a storm, not in all my born days, I don’t. Good ’evings, what a crash, an’ I’m sure I’m pleased to meet you again, my dear, for a perliter little boy I never see, a standin’ there a bowin’ and a bowin’ as if you could ’ardly leave it orf, as I see with me own eyes every time I looked through the door though ’ardly takin’ it in at the time through been’ wishful to cheer up ’Enery. But I’m glad you didn’t take our place for I’m in ’opes of persuadin’ ’im to leave Under as is not a town anybody would stay in if they could ’elp it, an’ start business in a better spot. My ’evings, what a flash—an’ ’im out in all this a-settin’ lookin’ at the dark side of things at a Conservative meetin’ an’ ’ating it the way ’e does, which orften as ’e ’ad ’is tea under the bed, pore feller, a-shriekin’ at every flash through rememberin’ ’is aunt as died in a thunder-storm at the age of ninety-five, an’

never spoke again, which reminds me, my dear, to ask you if you've got a place yet ? ”

“ No, not yet,” said John.

“ He jolly soon *will* have though,” said Augustus. “ We're going to try again to-night.”

“ Now don't you go out into the storm again to-night, my dears,” said the stout woman. “ It won't be over for a couple of hours yet. You put it orf till Monday an' set 'ere comfortable, remembering 'Enery's aunt. You won't 'ave no difficulty gettin' a place Monday. 'H'any one 'ud want a perlite little boy as keeps a-bowin' and a-bowin' as though 'e could 'ardly leave it orf, an' why don't you try the Mayor's ? ”

“ The Mayor's ? ” repeated John and Augustus, gazing at her in surprise.

“ How could I get a place as an errand-boy with a Mayor ? ” added John.

“ You could all right, my dear,” said the stout woman. “ Why not ? Trimmers is 'is name. Trimmers's shops is all over Under, 'e 'aving begun with one small one twenty years ago, but now 'as 'is own kerridge an' three footmen in suits through talkin' more than anyone in Under an' never losin' a chanst of it. E'd be glad to 'ave you, I'm sure, for a perliter little boy I never see,

a-bowin' and a-bowin' as if you could 'ardly leave it 'orf; an' Robert, as is my sister's son in one of Trimmers's, 'e was sayin' to me honly the other week—"the manners of the herrand-boys of the present day, Harnt," ses 'e to me, 'is somethink dreadful,' ses 'e, 'they not 'aving got none,' ses 'e. So you try Trimmers's, my dear."

"It's not half a bad idea," said Augustus, arising to leap thoughtfully. "My father knows old Trimmer. I'll bag one of my father's cards and we'll go and see him to-morrow. He's sure to be in on Sunday."

"Yes, you try Trimmers's," said the stout woman.

"And we might go and look at the outsides of some of his shops to-night," said Augustus, arising once more, "and settle which one of them Hazard would like best. The storm's not so bad now, I think, and we'd better——"

"Now you set 'ere comfortable remembering 'Enery's aunt an' eat your suppers thankful," said the stout woman, putting the surprised Augustus back into his seat. "The storm won't be over for another hour yet."

The storm gave emphasis to her remarks with

an undiminished roar of wind and thunder outside the shuttered windows at that moment; and it is in any event difficult to say good-bye to a person who will not say it to you, while to get up and merely walk away without saying anything to someone who has given you shelter and dry clothes and tea, and is in the midst of a conversation while preparing to give you supper, is more difficult yet. So John and Augustus sat still.

It was ten minutes to ten before the stout woman interrupted her conversation sufficiently to remark that she thought the storm was really beginning to roll off a bit; and at ten she said that perhaps they had better risk it now because of their mothers, though she herself was far from sure. At five minutes past ten, still discoursing anxiously about Monday and Henry's aunt, she shook hands with them at the shop-door in a kind of conversational trance which continued to emit remarks even when they were round the corner.

It was a wrecked city through which John and Augustus passed that night. Chimneys struck, walls flat, roofs off, slates scattered, leafage strewn, streets flooded—harm and damage everywhere; as though the hand of some irritated being had swept Under with an impatient blow.

Mother Letitlie had been long gone from her doorway by the time John passed it, for it is impossible to leave a thing be when it won't leave you, and had she remained in her doorway the storm would have blown her out of it into the gutter. But John's mother was on *her* doorstep, looking out for him in some anxiety, and she hurried him upstairs at once and to bed. Nor was John sorry to go there, after the arduous events with which he and Augustus had been wrestling that day. He fell asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow. But as the first faint change of the dawn broke over the city of Under, John began to dream. He dreamed he heard a voice calling him outside the window; and it called him so insistently and clearly that he awoke. He looked round him. The darkness was grey instead of black. He had gone to sleep amid the roar of distant thunder and the driving of wind and rain. Now there was silence outside except for the steady pour of a quiet shower and the sound of the window-curtains moving in the breeze. He lay still a moment, listening, and suddenly, down the silent street outside, he heard a footstep coming. It stopped underneath the window,

and John slipped out of bed and went to it and looked out.

The Hawker stood below in the quiet breeze and the grey light of the early day. He had no load of staves upon his shoulders, and he was standing looking down the street as if he were waiting for something before going on his way. When he heard John, he looked up.

“Good-bye,” said the Hawker.

A flood of questions rose to John’s lips at the sight of him.

“What happened last night, Hawker?” he began eagerly.

“Well, I’m afraid I haven’t time to tell you,” said the Hawker, “I am only stopping on my road for a minute to say good-bye. I must go on.”

“But tell me whether you found a way of saving the little man’s papers, anyway,” said John. “You’ve time to tell me that much.”

“There is a way to be found of doing most things,” said the Hawker. “Yes, we did do that. You’ll hear all the rest from him. Good-bye.”

“Well, we’ll see you on Monday, Hawker,” said John, reassuringly. “Clickson and I are

going to the Mayor's this afternoon to do the Charm at him and ask for a situation in one of his shops, and we'll come to the market-place on Monday and tell you if we get it."

The Hawker looked up, and smiled, and went away down the street through the rain and the morning wind ; and looked back no more.

John scrambled back into bed, and snuggling down into its warmth after the chilliness of the window, fell asleep again.

All the next day it rained off and on, and when John's mother went out after the midday dinner to take a Sunday meal to the old grandfather of the girl who came to help and never helped at all, she had to put on a waterproof for the first time for many a long day. At half-past three Augustus was to come down Down Street after his usual fashion, and at three John, in his Sunday suit, was standing considering on the doorstep, watching a shower that he hoped was about to leave off showering before he went out. James was not studying in the dining-room window. He had returned abstractedly and with no explanations to his interested mother, either as to the cook or the loaf, late in the evening of the day he had gone away with the brainless

Professor ; and that morning early he had again departed in the same manner. Amoris Ellen was changing her frock in the back bedroom with her usual rather worried irritation at having nothing she could call a frock to change into, preparatory to venting all her worries, and speedily forgetting them, in a burst of song at the old piano. The little house lay quiet and silent behind John, and he was just about to leave it and step out into the clearing shower, when he saw the figure of a lady coming down Down Street accompanied by a crowd of little boys. She put down her umbrella at that moment, and John recognized her with a shock of surprise and a slight sense of anxiety. It was Mariamne who was walking pensively down Down Street amid the little boys who always accompanied everybody down Down Street who did not belong there. She came along, looking about her, and when she was within a few feet of the doorstep, her eyes fell on John, who had stood on one leg several times in anticipation of the recognition.

“ *Boot-boy !* ” said Mariamne, stopping short with a pleased smile.

“ I’m not a boot-boy,” said John, smiling mildly.

“ Well, you very nearly were,” said Mariamne, coming up closer. “ Is this where you live, boot-boy ? ”

“ Yes,” said John.

“ It’s not much of a place to live in,” said Mariamne, looking about her, while all the little boys grouped themselves on the pavement and stared at her in dead silence.

“ Perhaps we shan’t all of us have to live in it always,” said John.

“ If you like, boot-boy,” said Mariamne, “ you can leave off living in it this minute. I came to find you to tell you so. You can come and live on Wickle Hill if you like. You needn’t come as boot-boy. You had better come as nothing at all, because nothing could be more inexplicable than that, and I want to have somebody in the house whom nobody can explain and who never explain anything to me. I never met anybody who explained so little as you, so I thought of offering you the post. It will drive poor George completely mad, of course. He will spend hours trying to explain you, and you can’t explain a thing that hasn’t an explanation. But I don’t know that we need very much mind George’s going mad. Will you come, boot-boy ? ”

But John was spared the difficulty of deciding whether he would accept the post of the representation of the inexplicable in Mariamne's undisciplined household to the further maddening of the stout gentleman, for suddenly, in the upstairs parlour, Amoris Ellen began to sing.

Mariamne gave a start, and stood transfixed. The little boys transferred their gaze from her to the open parlour window and listened as those who had heard this phenomenon before and could dispassionately consider it. John, in some embarrassment at the emotion he saw on the face of Mariamne, stood thoughtfully upon one leg.

Higher and higher and more and more passionately sang Amoris Ellen, pouring out all her anguish at the worry of having no frock to change into that you could call a frock, and similar griefs of the kind, in a flood of the beautiful notes, the mere sound of which always comforted her before she had sung very many of them.

"*Boot-boy!*" gasped Mariamne. "Who's that?"

"It's my sister," said John.

There was a rush and a whirl of skirts, and Mariamne had disappeared through the open door

behind John, and he and the little boys were left gazing at each other, while upstairs, a minute later, the sound of the singing abruptly ceased. John did not remain gazing very long, however, for at that moment Augustus, also in his Sunday suit, came bursting down the street and stopped at the doorstep.

“Why weren’t you up the street?” he demanded wrathfully.

“Mariamne’s in there,” said John. “She heard my sister singing.”

The countenance of Augustus Clickson changed as the portentousness of this revelation dawned upon him. He put his hands in his pockets and leapt. “My gracious,” he said. “She’ll tell your mother everything, and we shall probably have to tell her everything too. Let’s get away while we can.”

So they hastened out of Down Street.

The Mayor’s palace was a huge and hideous house with great gates and a gravel sweep and several little bushes growing along the edge of the sweep, or rather not growing there. John and Augustus entered the gates at half-past three. Augustus was carrying the bagged card of the Hon. Asaph Clickson wrapped in his clean Sunday

pocket-handkerchief, and the slight uncertainty of the three footmen who were posed in lofty attitudes on the wide sweep of steps that led to the front doors, changed into politeness at the sight of it. Mr. Asaph Clickson's name was well known to the footmen of Under; they at once came to the correct conclusion that this must be his son.

"Certainly, sir. This way, sir. His Worship is within, sir," said the three footmen, bowing.

When John and Augustus had walked through several entrances into the hall, the footman who was leading them paused. The air was filled with a sort of loud confused sound, which John and Augustus immediately recognized as the sound of a party.

"May I ask, sir," said the footman, "whether you wish to see his Worship alone?"

"Yes, we do," said Augustus, "We've come on especial business with him. We don't want to go into the party." Though John and Augustus did not know it, unexpected and unusual people had been arriving already that day at the Mayor's Palace on especial business, and the footman perceived nothing surprising in the fact that here were apparently two more.

“Then perhaps, sir,” said he, “I had better show you first into the ante-chamber.”

So he ushered them across the hall, and showed them into a large and lofty room, from beyond the closed folding doors of which the sound of the party was arising in a perfect roar. But John and Augustus had neither ears nor eyes for anything but the sight which met their astonished gaze as the footman flung open the door; for there, on a small gilt chair in the middle of the room, sat the little man.

The footman closed the door and departed to seek an opportunity of delivering the bagged card of the Hon. Asaph Clickson to the Mayor; but John and Augustus remained gazing upon the threshold in an amazement that the behaviour of the little man did not tend to lessen. He was seated on the extreme edge of his chair, wearing an expression of profound, resigned and astounded meditation; and from time to time he feverishly wiped his brow. A pleased but pre-occupied smile of recognition dawned in his eyes as he perceived John and Augustus, but no sign of surprise.

“My dear lads!” he said. “Have they sent for you also? I am very glad you have come.

We are all patriots together, and the Mayor has gone to fetch the band." At this moment the door which led into the hall flew open, and a portly gentleman burst excitedly into the room.

"My dear sir," he cried, "the few representative citizens whom I have assembled in haste to do you honour are waiting and eager to——" His eye fell on John and Augustus and he paused, still beaming, but expectant. He had evidently not yet received the bagged card of the Hon. Asaph Clickson.

"Oh, I thought you had been sent for," said the little man, arising from his chair. "These, sir, are the two friends of mine of whom I told you, who were—who are—that is, I mean—they helped me yesterday. But I do assure you, sir——"

"Nay, nay, Sir Timothy," cried the portly gentleman, "this is undue modesty." He seized the hands of John and Augustus and shook them with all his might. "I am delighted to see you, delighted," he cried. "The few representative citizens whom I have assembled in haste are waiting and eager to do you honour. Come this way, my dear sir, and you, my young friends, come this way, come this way."

He rushed across the room to the folding doors, and as he laid his hand upon them, as if by a signal they were flung apart by two footmen on the other side, the music of "Lo, the conquering hero comes" crashed upon the air, and a large room opened on the view, full to overflowing with the few representative citizens who seemed to the dazed John and Augustus to run into hundreds and whose countenances looked like a sea. As John and Augustus and the little man advanced into the room, impelled onwards by the excited portly gentleman, all the representative citizens arose from their rows of chairs, burst into loud cheers and waved large white handkerchiefs.

There stood John and Augustus, amazed beyond words, receiving the inexplicable plaudits of the representative citizens; while the little man, a few paces in front, bowed mechanically from right to left, and feverishly wiped his brow. "I do assure you——" he kept saying, but nobody heard him. The portly gentleman, laughing with delight, hovered round him and circled about him like a large bumble bee that had lost its head. At last he collected himself, advanced, raised his hand and called for silence.

“My friends,” he said, “you most of you know more or less why I have called you hither in such haste this afternoon. But a few words of fuller explanation may not be amiss.”

“I do assure you, sir——” cried the little man.

“Nay, nay, Sir Timothy, this is undue modesty,” cried the portly gentleman.

“Hear, hear,” cried the representative citizens; and a lady in the front row to whom the few words of fuller explanation would certainly not be amiss since she appeared to be greatly mixed in her mind as to why she had been called thither in such haste, fixed a lorgnette upon John and remarked in a loud voice, “Strange that so young a child should be thus plunged in deep deceit.”

“No, my dear madam. Hush, you mistake,” said every one round her in shocked accents; and the portly gentleman waved his hand for silence.

“All unknown to us,” he cried, “we have had for weeks in our midst—working not only at the great book for which the nation waits but also for the good of his country—working in retirement, in obscurity, with the modesty

which ever distinguishes the truly gifted—one whose name is known to all the world. I allude to Sir Timothy Griggs, wealthiest of antiquarians, most antiquated of wealthy men.”

“I do assure you, sir——” cried the little man.

“Nay, nay, Sir Timothy, this is undue modesty,” cried the portly gentleman. “As an antiquarian, however, ladies and gentleman, Sir Timothy is too well known to need any introduction. His name carries instant recognition. All the world has read his wonderful book on ‘Greek Symbols and Customs,’ and his last one on ‘Roman Remains’—and all the world remembers the dastardly way in which, hearing of its preparation, others, who shall be nameless, strove to cut the ground from beneath his pen by bringing out another book just before his, founded on information and knowledge wormed out of Sir Timothy himself. But perhaps you are not yet aware of the intensely interesting fact that this noble city of Under of which we are so justly proud was once a Roman settlement itself. Sir Timothy has reason to believe that there are many traces to be found of it among our river-side buildings, and that, in some place above the river, probably on the now inaccessible

heights of our mighty cliff, there was once a great place of worship dedicated to Mercury, the god called Hermes among the Greeks, a god who had travellers and sailors under his especial protection, and who was here, in the city that even in those days was a famous seaport of the north, especially honoured and worshipped."

There was a hum of interest and excitement among the representative citizens as the portly gentleman triumphantly brought forth the intensely interesting facts that he had never heard of till that day; and the little man, with a miserable face, listened in silence and resignation as his secret was remorselessly flung to the world.

"But it is not to Sir Timothy Griggs as an antiquarian," cried the portly gentleman, "that I have called upon you to do honour to-day. It is in a new and hitherto unknown character that Sir Timothy is among us. Ladies and gentlemen, I call for three cheers for Sir Timothy Griggs, the patriot."

"I do assure you, sir——" cried the little man; but his words were drowned in the cheers which rang through the room.

"Last night," cried the portly gentleman

at the top of his voice, flushed with enthusiasm and waving his arms wildly, "Sir Timothy Griggs, practically alone and single-handed, arrested and captured and deprived of his ill-gotten spoils in the midst of the desolate uplands, in the midst of a storm such as this city has never before experienced, a foreign spy whom he had been tracking for weeks in Under, and who was, just at this most critical period of international affairs, in the act of escaping to safety with detailed plans and description of the defences, the guns, the forts and the secrets of the great naval port of Wayport, our nearest neighbour. The spy himself, I regret to say, escaped, but Sir Timothy secured all his papers, and England was saved a serious disaster. Sir Timothy Griggs, ladies and gentlemen, is the saviour of his country."

"I assure you, I do assure you," cried the little man desperately, but nobody heard him in the tumult and the excitement which followed; and the loud "My gracious" of Augustus Clickson also entirely escaped notice. Augustus Clickson himself, together with John, was immediately whirled into a vortex which allowed him no breath for further remarks. The rest of

the call which he and John were making upon the Mayor passed more or less like a dream—not a bad dream, but the sort of dream in which nobody asks any questions, and everyone takes the most extraordinary things for granted, and behaves as if things were what they aren't and never could have been. On the edge of the dream they saw the footman bowing every now and again, still bearing the silver salver and the bagged card of the Hon. Asaph Clickson which he seemed thoughtfully uncertain of ever being able to deliver.

The representative citizens of Under were much too busy making money to save England from anything themselves, so it naturally pleased them very much to find that someone else had, without charging them anything for it, saved her from a mishap that might have cost them a great deal. When they could not, because of the crowd around him, clap the little man on the back or shake him by the hand, they clapped John and Augustus on the back and shook them by the hand : and all the female representative citizens gave them tea, talking at the tops of their voices. John and Augustus were given no opportunity of explaining anything or of asking

for explanations ; and nobody did explain anything to them in consequence except the lady from the front row, who explained for nearly half an hour that she had thought they were the spies themselves. The portly gentleman, one large benevolent hand on the little man's shoulder, explained everything to every one, however, entirely wrong—from the first skilful tracking of the spy by Sir Timothy Griggs in Under to the last desperate hand-to-hand struggle alone in the hills ; and whenever the little man said despairingly “ But I do assure you, sir,” the portly gentleman said “ Nay, nay, Sir Timothy, this is undue modesty,” and went on explaining. Finally the little man gave up trying to assure anyone of anything, and merely bowed mechanically right and left, and feverishly wiped his brow.

At last there came a message brought by several hurrying citizens to the small tables at which John and Augustus, each seated erect and in the silence of stupefaction, were being plied with cakes, fruits, ices, sandwiches, sweets, coffee and tea by the female representative citizens. Sir Timothy Griggs found himself obliged to make an early departure, and would be glad if

his young friends would accompany him, since he had declined the offer of a carriage and would make his early departure on foot.

Five minutes later, John and Augustus and the little man, escorted to the very last step by the Mayor and the representative citizens and the footmen, left the palace of the Mayor, and walked through the great gates and out into the street.

CHAPTER XV

THE CHARM SUCCEEDS

As soon as they had got round a corner, and the Mayor's palace was out of sight, the little man stopped short and wiped his brow.

"Let me collect myself and tell you all," he said. So, as soon as he had collected himself, they walked on slowly together, and he told them all.

"The man you call the Hawker," he said, "took me to the foot of the cliff that towers over this city. Which way we went I cannot say. In the darkness and confusion of that terrible storm I could only hold on to him and go with him blindly. Who, my dear lads," said the little man, interrupting himself, "is this man you call the Hawker?"

"Oh, he is just a Hawker," said Augustus Clickson. "He's a friend of ours. Go on."

"Well, he is a strange Hawker," said the little man. "Thinking over it in calmness and daylight afterwards, I cannot myself understand

the eagerness and confidence with which I went with him into the night. But I did. He took me to the cliff. We said little on the road. I needed all my breath for my struggle through the storm, through which he, by the way, appeared to stride without effort. For the last part of the way we appeared to be going on grass among quantities of little hills, and there I first perceived that two people had joined us, a woman and a little girl. They seemed to be coming swiftly along in the same anxious confidence as myself, hurrying along in silence, and keeping close to the Hawker. We reached the cliff. The incessant glare of the lightning showed me a strange large piece of rock jutting out from its face, just beside us. I heard a curious sound, as of stone moving smoothly on stone, and the rock disappeared. A light suddenly flashed in front of me, and I heard the Hawker's voice, as if from within the cliff, bidding us come on. I went on, and found myself in sudden silence. He was standing, with a lantern, in a hewn chamber within the cliff, and the rock had rolled into position behind us. In that place of mighty walls, the storm which had so dazed and deafened and

blinded us outside was no more than a faint and distant roar—but I forget, my dear lads,” said the little man, interrupting himself, “you probably know this strange place much better than I do.”

“We never heard of it before,” said Augustus Clickson, too much surprised even to leap.

“Never,” said John.

“Nor of the stairway that leads from it up into the cliff?” said the little man.

“A *stairway*!” cried Augustus at the top of his voice; while John could only gaze at him in amazement.

“A stairway, a wonderful stairway,” said the little man. “A stairway that rises right through the cliff and comes out high above Under among the forests. A stairway worn with the feet of generations, ancient and hollowed, centuries old. Is it possible that you did not know of its existence?”

“*Nobody* knows of its existence,” said Augustus with a gasp. “*Nobody’s* ever heard of such a thing.”

“Perhaps *that’s* the way that people vanished out of Under long ago,” said John, drawing a deep breath of utter amazement.

“It is the way the Hawker took us last night, at any rate,” said the little man, “and it is a way I must go again and yet again. Nothing I have come across in this city has interested and astonished me so profoundly. Who made it, who used it, who needed it, in those long dead centuries of a vanished world! But let me return to my story.”

He paused, wiped his brow, and went on.

“We climbed up that stairway behind the Hawker. In the forests above we were greatly sheltered from the storm by the thickness of the trees, nor did it appear to be raging there with anything like the same ferocity as down below. We went up and up, always ascending, the Hawker aiding the little girl, till we reached a little hut in a glade. There, still in silence, he gave us food and drink, and deposited his load of staves. Then we went on, apparently by a pass through bare and tree-less uplands, and came out on a wide space of flat country, over which the moon was now shining among the hurrying clouds. At no great distance we found a railway and by it a little wooden platform with an apparatus for watering engines. There we sat down and waited, while the Hawker

walked up and down, looking out over the country. Presently we heard the distant sound of an approaching train, and its lights were soon visible, creeping slowly up. It reached us, and stopped; and judge of my astonishment, my dear lads, when out of it stepped the old man whose departure I had helped in the station in Under. It was the goods train."

John and Augustus gazed on him breathlessly. The sense of the scheme had flashed suddenly upon them. While the goods train was making its long slow journey along the plains and up the valley and round on to the tableland—to pass Under once more, high above it in the night—the Hawker had taken his companions straight up through the forests and the uplands, and had reached the halt before the train did.

"Well, my gracious!" said Augustus Clickson.

"He stepped out," said the little man, breathless himself, as if agitated by the memory of so exciting a moment, "and saw me. He stopped short, stepped back, threw up his arms and said 'It is the English spy.' I said 'I want my papers—only give me back my papers,' but the Hawker laid his hand on his shoulder and said, 'Not only his, but all.'"

“What did he mean?” said John and Augustus simultaneously.

“Wait, I will tell you,” said the little man, wiping his brow. “The guard came hurrying up and the Hawker said ‘This gentlemen has taken with him by mistake papers which belong to this other gentleman—and also elsewhere. Three to one, sir, you see. Give in,’ and the man in disguise said ‘I give in. I’m caught.’ The Hawker said, ‘Not caught—headed and turned. A traveller has always a hundred roads to turn to.’

“Then the man in disguise opened his coat, and with a knife, he ripped open its lining and took out numbers of papers, which the Hawker gave me. The man in disguise said, ‘What are you going to do with me?’ and the Hawker replied, ‘What should we do with you? Go on your road.’ So he stood for a moment in silence, staring at the Hawker, and then he turned round and climbed back into the van, and shut the door. The Hawker, speaking with the guard, went off to the woman and child, and I saw them get in also. In a moment or two the goods train moved off, leaving me and the Hawker alone; but when I looked up from

putting the papers away in my pockets, he was gone."

"What did you do?" said John. Augustus, still lost in amazement at the little man's story, thrust his hands deep into his pockets and leapt on high.

"I waited on the platform till a train came along the other way, going down to Under," said the little man, "and returned on it in the dawn. But it was only when it grew light that I had an opportunity of examining the papers—it was only then that I fully realized the extraordinary thing which had happened."

The little man paused, and once more wiped his brow.

"We really *are* the saviours of our country, my dear lads," he said, "we and the Hawker. My own papers were all right, but with them were many others. The man was a spy himself. He had given me up all the documents with which he had been escaping from this country to his own—and the whole mystery is explained. Of course there was then but one course I could pursue, however averse I might be to it personally. Directly I reached Under, I took the spy's papers to the Mayor, whose name and

address I happened to know, and he naturally recognized me at once and asked me why I was here and whether there were any Roman remains in Under. So I had to explain everything. But the one thing I found it impossible to explain was that we had saved the country entirely by mistake. He was too much excited to listen. You cannot explain a thing to a person who refuses to listen. He said it was my undue modesty. We can explain it later in the proper quarters if we have to. But we will endeavour not to incriminate William and my poor Landlord if we can help it, my dear lads. They will surely have learned their lesson this time, poor fellows. All the rest," said the little man, with a sigh, "you know, and I can only hope the Mayor has not irretrievably ruined the future of my book on Under, for its story is known to no one but myself, and I was straining every nerve to prevent its being anticipated by others. The mere fact of my being heard of in a place is enough to set everybody travelling up to it with spades and pick-axes. But I think I am safe. I think I have collected sufficient facts already."

Augustus and John still walked along in amazement and bewilderment. It is certainly

surprising to come out to find a situation as an errand-boy and discover yourselves instead to be the saviours of your country.

“And the first thing I must do is to see that Hawker,” said the little man. “I must see him, not only to try and reward him in some measure for the great services he has rendered everybody, but also to ask him about that extraordinary stairway, and to beg him to show it me again, and tell me all he knows about it.”

“We’ll come with you,” said Augustus with decision.

“Its extraordinary situation——,” said the little man, and with a violent start John came to a sudden stop in the middle of the pavement. The word had brought the electrifying recollection of another sort of situation to his mind.

“Clickson!” he said, “We never did the Charm at the Mayor!”

“No more we did!” ejaculated Augustus.

They stood and looked at each other. No more they had! In the extraordinary turn which events had taken the instant they entered the Mayor’s palace, they had completely forgotten the business on which they had originally entered it.

"We're fools, and so I tell you," said Augustus. "This comes from being mixed up in other people's business, and I've warned you of it from the very beginning, and now I hope you'll believe me, John Hazard. Come on back at once, and we'll do it at him this instant, before anything else has time to happen."

The little man had stared in bewilderment, looking from one to the other.

"What is the matter, what has happened?" he said. John and Augustus glanced at each other. They had momentarily forgotten the presence of the little man.

"Nothing much, thanks," said John politely. "It's only something we've forgotten. I'm afraid we must be going now. Good-bye."

"But what did you say you were going to do at the Mayor?" said the little man with excitement.

Again John and Augustus glanced at each other.

"It wasn't anything at all," said John. "At least, hardly anything. We said it by mistake. We must go now, I'm afraid. Good-bye."

"You said you were going to do a Charm at him," cried the little man. "A Charm! Am I in the nineteenth century! Am I dreaming!"

You are going to do a Charm at a Mayor. What is the Charm for ? ”

“ Don’t tell him,” said Augustus, turning red. “ He’ll laugh at the silly rot.”

“ *Laugh !* ” cried the little man, “ *I laugh !* I, who spend my days in search of the beautiful old beliefs and legends of the earth, of the rituals and symbols of ancient faiths—I, to whom the ancient world, with its grasp on the unseen, is more real than the groping world around us now, I who believe that the forces of life and Nature are still conscious of the struggling lives of men and still reach the hands held out to them ! What is a Charm but a hand held out ! *I laugh !* ”

Augustus, in astonishment, gazed upon the little man, and, putting his hands in his pockets, leapt abstractedly on high.

“ What is the Charm—Who gave you the Charm—Why did you need a Charm ? ” said the little man.

“ Shall I tell him, Clickson ? ” said John uncertainly.

“ Oh, *I don’t mind,*” said Augustus. “ If he believes all that sort of stuff already, I don’t see that it matters telling him anything. The Hawker never said we weren’t to.”

“The Hawker?” said the little man, “I might have guessed it had something to do with that strange friend of yours. What is the Charm for?”

“It’s to get me a situation,” said John.

“Why do you want a situation?” said the little man, surprised.

“Well, because we’re rather poor,” said John, “and I wanted to earn a little money to encourage my mother. But Clickson and I couldn’t find a situation, so the Hawker gave us a Charm to help us. This is it.”

The little man took the staff in his hand, and looked at its rough carving.

“An extraordinary coincidence!” he cried, with a start. “These are wings, and this is a twisted snake.”

“You have to try it four times before it succeeds,” explained John.

“Will this be the fourth time?” said the little man eagerly.

“Yes,” said John.

The little man handed the Charm back to him with solemnity.

“Your Charm shall succeed,” he said. “Do it at me.”

“What for?” said John, bewildered.

“Because *I* will give you a situation,” said the little man. “I can give you as good a situation as any Mayor. The Charm shall succeed. We will put it at once beyond all doubt. *I* will engage you.”

“What as?” said Augustus, with sense.

“I don’t know,” said the little man. “I haven’t the least idea. What does it matter. The Charm shall succeed. I will engage you.”

“Will it be as something better than an errand-boy?” said Augustus.

“An errand-boy?” said the little man, surprised. “I should hope so. Go on, go on. Do the Charm at me.”

John looked at Augustus for guidance in this unexpected and unprecedented turn of events. Augustus put his hands in his pockets and leapt thoughtfully.

“Go on, idiot,” he remarked.

“But what will he engage me as?” said John.

“What does it matter what he engages you as so long as he does engage you?” said Augustus. “He says it will be as something better than an errand-boy, anyhow, and he ought to know. Go on.”

Still in bewilderment, John took the Charm in his left hand. The words he had said so often came to his lips again.

“Do you want a boy, please, sir?” said John, and swept his right hand from his forehead to the ground.

“Yes, I do,” said the little man, solemnly, “I engage you.”

And there the story ends.

James became the mathematical assistant of the brainless Professor—at least every one thought he must have done so, though neither he nor the Professor ever said that he had. But that was chiefly because they so seldom said anything to anyone. At any rate, on James remaining permanently away from his home, it was thought he must be remaining in Rider’s Lane, and when search was made for him he was found there, correcting the elemental part of the mathematics of the second part of the Professor’s treatise on solar radiation; and the woman, having recovered from an attack of bronchitis, had reappeared, and was cooking for them both. So there James stayed, and there he eventually became famous, till he and the Professor both

became so famous that they were taken away by a Government and placed in what the Government called a wider sphere. But James took no more notice of being famous than he ever took of anything, and he went on walking up and down laboratories working out abstruse problems in much the same way as he had walked up and down the dining-room in Down Street. Till James became so famous that he had to be removed, Mr. Whillipson used to rush in and out of Rider's Lane to see him, in a state of great triumph and excitement, but the time came when Mr. Whillipson's Day Academy for Young Gentlemen became so famous too, on account of its having had James in it, that it also had to be removed, and Mr. Whillipson re-established it in a beautiful country village far away, and was poor no more.

As for Amoris Ellen, she went away with Mariamne, and Mariamne had her voice trained; and when she grew up, she went through the world singing higher and higher as she had once sung in Down Street; and the world came to listen to her as Down Street once had done. Amoris Ellen remained slightly irritable all her life, but it is a soothing thing to the nerves to

have the world listening to one ; and at any rate she never again had to sing away her feelings at having the breakfast things to wash up, or no frock to change into that you could call a frock.

John's mother went away also. She went away to live near the school to which the little man sent John till he should be old enough to take a situation as a soldier under the King, as his father had done before him.

But the Hawker who had come to Under with dreams and winds was gone. They looked for him everywhere, in the market and up in the forest ; but he was gone, and he never came back. His hut stood empty in the glade near the mound among the bracken, and its door swung open. Perhaps he was gone to sell elsewhere the staves that could start men on such long journeys.

In the dawn of the day that he went away, a shoulder of the cliff came down. It fell with a long sliding roar that shook the forests and echoed in the heavens, and it buried for ever the Hawker's stair and the waterfall. People said that the long heat of the summer must have opened the seams of the cliff, and the rain of

the storm had streamed in behind the rocks and loosened them. That may have been so or not, but at any rate no one went up out of the city by those ways again, for they were gone.

But whether by this road or that men long ago climbed out of Under with a good courage for hope or help or liberty, there is still, and there always will be, a way out for every one who once starts to climb.

As for old Mother Letitlie, for all I know she is sitting in Down Street still.

L'ENVOI

I

They cross the crowded market-place
Two questing figures, hurrying by,
Augustus, bold of mind and face,
And little John, composed and shy ;
Shadows mid shadows—here and gone—
They pass, they fade. The tale is done. }

II

But we, we dwell in Under still.
What are we all but children yet !
“ How high,” we say, “ this wall of hill
Above the walls about us set ! ”
Come they no more who once knew where
Up through the hill-side climbed a stair ?

III

Comes he no more—the god of winds,
Of trades and messages and mirth ?
God of the dreams that move the minds
And draw the wandering sons of earth.
Often he passed this way—'twas when
The gods men worshipped walked with men.

IV

Treads he no more on silent feet
Alone at night the Street called Down ?
Where run the ways through that dark Street
That once led out of Under town ?
O'er the Waste Lands and up the Hill
Leads there no road from Under still ?

V

The gods are gone. Long since they went
Beyond the hills and far away.
But what of old the old gods meant
Moves in an unchanged world to-day ;
And named of every age anew
That nameless furtherance holds true.

VI

The feet that climb, the voice that calls,
The heart that will not own despair—
Out of the skies their answer falls,
In pathless wilds their path is there.
Life flows to inspire what life began—
He can, who, dauntless, thinks he can.

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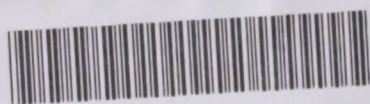
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